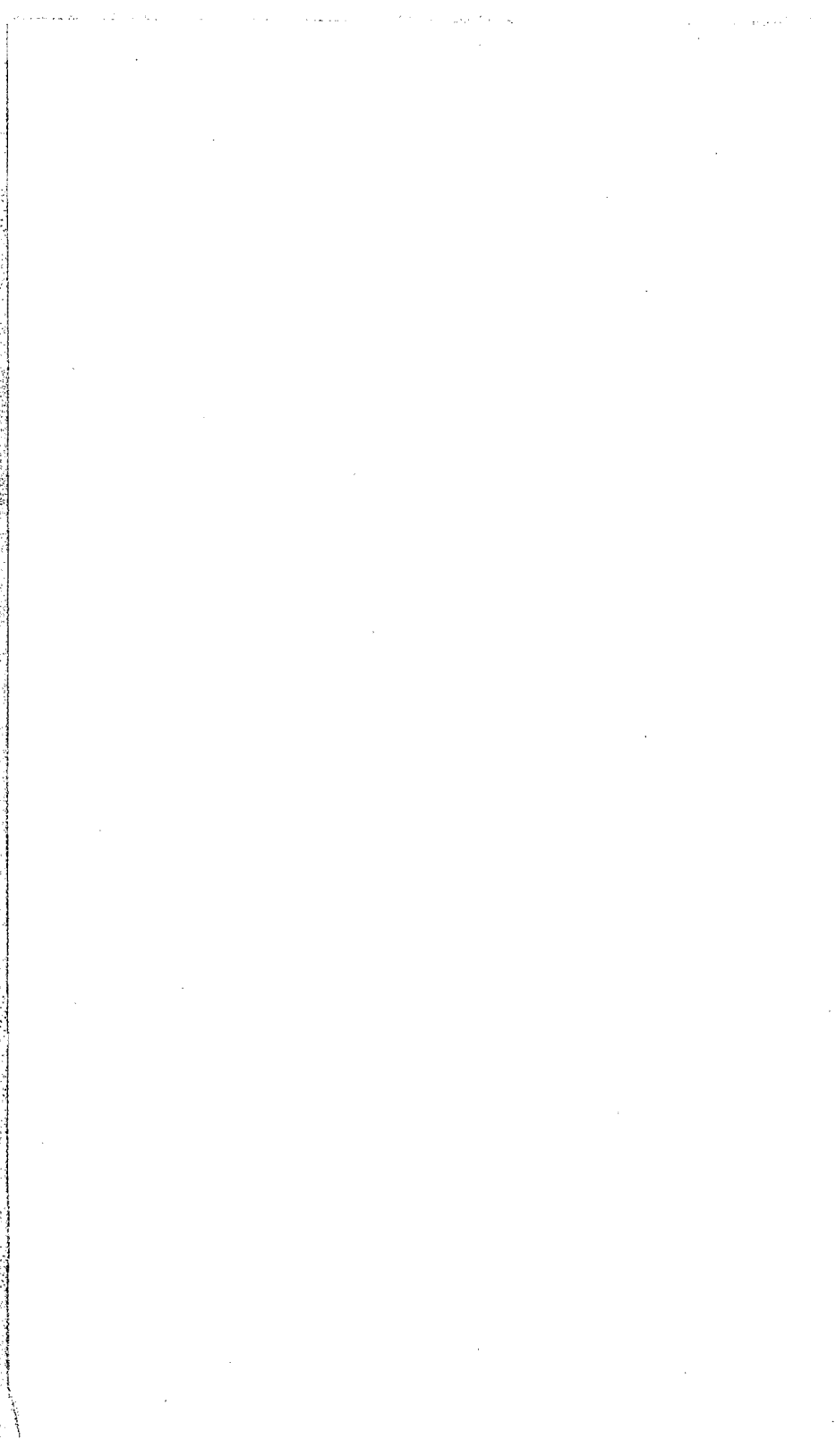


Guru Granth Sahib

GURU-ETERNAL FOR THE SIKHS



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Guru-Eternal for the Sikhs

DHARAM SINGH



Singh Brothers
Amritsar

GURU GRANTH SAHIB

Guru-Eternal for the Sikhs

by

Dr. DHARAM SINGH

PROFESSOR, DEPTT. OF ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF SIKHISM,
PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA - 147 002

TELE : 0175-228 2079

E-mail : sikhencypbj@yahoo.com

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INTRODUCTION

The first recension of the Sikh scripture, now popularly known as the Guru Granth Sahib, was first compiled in 1604 under the personal care and supervision of Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru of the Sikh faith. Thereafter it underwent change only once when Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last person – Guru of the faith, added to it, in 1705, the hymns of his spiritual predecessor, Guru Tegh Bahadur; otherwise the text has ever since remained absolutely unaltered. It was a little thereafter, in 1708 to be exact, that he apotheosized the scripture, or to be more precise the Word as contained therein, as Guru Eternal for the community.

The Sikh tradition believes the Word as contained in the scripture as the spirit-incarnate of the Gurus; unlike Christianity wherein Word becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ and thus the latter becomes the central focus for the followers, in the Sikh tradition the Gurus are believed to have become incarnate in the Word. That is why Word is the central focus in the Sikh tradition. It is an article of faith and an object of deep reverence for the Sikhs: this reverence must not be confused with worship because the Sikhs do not treat the scripture as an idol to be worshipped at an altar.

The Sikhs are deeply attached to the Guru: in fact, the existence of a Sikh (lit. disciple) implies the presence of Guru (lit. teacher who removes the darkness of ignorance). But the relationship between the two is not of form, but of spirit, implying thereby the Sikhs' firm belief that mere expression of faith in the Guru and just a glimpse of the Guru are not going

to help. Man must seek guidance from the Guru, and the latter will show the way which the former must tread himself. Therefore, the Sikhs must read the scriptural hymns, try to understand their true import and then put that understanding into practice in their daily life. That is what true *nam-simran* (remembrance of Divine Name) stands for.

Among the unique features of the Sikh scripture can be counted its catholicity; it contains the wisdom of holy men, belonging to different religious denominations, caste-groups and far-off regions, spread over a period of about five centuries. It strongly holds to the view that truth cannot be the monopoly of any particular tradition, and that revelation is not religion-specific, region-specific, caste-specific or person-specific. This makes Sikh religion pluralist in nature as against many earlier traditions being obviously exclusivist or inclusivist. This kind of attitude is a must to co-exist in peace and harmony in modern-day world of religious and cultural pluralism.

The year 2004 marks the 400th anniversary of the compilation of the Guru Granth Sahib, and is being celebrated as such by the Sikhs all over the world. It is an opportunity for the Sikhs to renew their faith in and commitment to the Guru. The present monograph is a modest attempt to give, in brief, the Sikh understanding of the concept of the Guru, the person-Gurus manifesting themselves, in spirit, in the Word, the history of the compilation of the scripture, its structural features, the Sikh world-view and its message vis-à-vis some modern-day issues like the interfaith dialogue, religious pluralism, and harmony and peace.

Punjabi University,
Patiala.

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Dharam Singh

Chapter I

SIKHISM : AN OVERVIEW

The origins of the word '*sikh*', which is now part of Punjabi vocabulary, can be traced back both to Sanskrit and Pali languages. According to one view, it is derived from the Sanskrit word '*shishya*' which means a disciple or a learner whereas, according to the other view, it is a derivative of Pali words *sissa* or *sekha* or *sekkha* : these words are almost identical with '*sikh*' or '*shishya*' and they exactly stand for one under training in a religious doctrine. In the Sikh tradition, the word '*sikh*' has come to be used for the disciples of Guru Nanak and his nine spiritual successors for whom Word, as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib, is the Guru Eternal. Obviously, the existence of a *sikh* or *sekkha* or *shishya* implies the presence of the *guru* : the Sikhs are thus deeply attached to their Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, and the Guru Granth Sahib.

In terms of its growth and development on the dimensions of history and time, the Sikh religion happens to be the youngest of the major world religions. In this sense it also represents the latest stage in the evolution of religious consciousness of mankind. It was born on the Indian soil and developed amidst the Indian culture although Islam, a Semitic religion, had also then come to stay as a major religion. The Sikh Gurus seem to have envisioned the movement they had initiated to have a separate and distinct identity of its own. This, of course, did not imply rancour or intolerance towards

the other prevailing religions, rather Sikhism provides us a constructive critique of the prevalent religions, their doctrines and practices but still remains tolerant towards them.

Sikhism originated about five hundred years back with Guru Nanak (1469-1539) in the north-west of the Indian sub-continent. Guru Nanak was born at Talwandi Rai Bhoie (the place is now popularly known as Nankana Sahib) in present-day Pakistan, spent his childhood there and got married and had two sons. He was at Sultanpur Lodhi working as keeper of stores with the local Nawab, Daulat Khan, when he had had the revelation around the turn of the century. As it happened, one morning Nanak went out to bathe in the Bein rivulet as was his wont and fell into a trance and did not come back home for three successive days. The revelation that Guru Nanak received has two peculiar traits: one, unlike Islam where Prophet Mohammad received the Divine revelation indirectly through archangel Gabriel, Guru Nanak received it direct from Nirankar, the Sikh term for the formless God. Second, he did not receive it in piecemeal but had the whole of it in one single 'meeting' (mystical communion) with God. Whatever he said or did in later years was the outcome of the communion.

After having received the revelation, Guru Nanak went out to share his message, the truth he had received from God with mankind in general. The sojourns he undertook are called *udasis* or preaching odysseys, and he undertook four such *udasis*. He travelled far and wide, going to far off areas in all the four directions. He visited almost every centre of pilgrimage or an otherwise holy place that fell on his way and met the holy men there notwithstanding their religious affiliation. He shared his message with whomsoever he came in contact, but never forced anyone to agree to his viewpoint. He held discourses with them, listening to their point of view and then presenting his own. Many people were convinced of the

veracity of the truth that Guru Nanak preached and they accepted his beliefs and practices. Many people were convinced of the veracity of the truth that Guru Nanak preached and they accepted his beliefs and practices.

The Guru knit together such followers into groups called *sangats* at various places which he visited. He asked these followers to meet daily or at regular intervals and sing praises of the Lord-God. The meeting-place of such *sangats* or congregations came to be called *dharamsala* which later on developed into the modern-day *gurdwara*. Sikhism makes no distinction between individual/private and communal/public prayer : neither of them is better or more effective than the other. However, the Sikh preference for the latter is only to provide the devotees an occasion and a platform to sit and pray together. This was necessary to eradicate the malady of inequality and untouchability so deeply rooted in contemporary Indian society. During these preaching odysseys, the Guru also uttered many revelatory hymns which he noted down and preserved with him. He also took care to note down and preserve the verses of any holy man of whatever tradition which he found to be identical with his own metaphysical and social ideology. This marked the beginning of the compilation of the Sikh scripture which the Sikhs today acknowledge and revere as the Guru Granth Sahib.

After completing his preaching odysseys, Guru Nanak settled down at Kartarpur (now in Pakistan) where he worked in his fields to earn his living, gathered around him a congregation which would sing eulogies of God and also work in the fields for their living. This was a typical example of an ideal Sikh way of life – *nam japna* (remembering Name Divine), *kirat karna* (doing honest labour with one's own hands) and *wand chhakna* (sharing with others whatever one earns through one's honest labours). Sikhism is against anybody becoming a

parasite on society : each one must earn through righteous means and then he must share that earning with the needy, says the Sikh scripture. That is the basic Sikh teaching which has always exhorted them to earn enough to help others, rather than depend on others. That is perhaps one of the major reasons that Sikhs throughout the world today enjoy relatively a good economic position, and the community as such can boast of having no beggars from amongst them.

Guru Nanak, having felt the need to provide a consistency and stamina to the movement he had initiated, appointed a successor to his mission. The successor was Bhai Lahina, renamed Angad (*angad* in Punjabi means of one's own *ang* or limb of one's body). Sikhism believes in the idea of oneness, in spirit, of the Gurus despite their bodily vestures being different : this idea finds expression in the *Var* by Satta and Balvand which is included in the scripture under Ramkali *raga*. Thus, (Guru) Angad became the second Nanak : "Guru Nanak imparted his light to Lahina by changing his form," says Bhai Gurdas, the known Sikh exegete and who also served as scribe with Guru Arjan when he prepared the first recension of the Sikh scripture. This succession continued nine times, until Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) who just before his demise put an end to the institution of person-Guru, and bestowed this office for all time to come on the Word or the Word as contained in the scripture.

It is widely accepted among Sikh scholars that all the original doctrines and concepts of the Sikh faith have been articulated by Guru Nanak. The succeeding Gurus only provided an explanation and explication of these. They also set up new and consolidated the earlier institutions to put these precepts into practice. Guru Angad (1504-52) standardized the Gurmukhi script which later on became the medium for writing the scripture. The following Gurus initiated the *manji*

and *masand* systems to preach Guru Nanak's message in far off places. Guru Amar Das (1479-1574) took special care to strengthen the institution of *langar*: a prince or a pauper whosoever wanted to see the Guru must first have his food in the *langar* was the Guru's common injunction to all. Guru Ram Das (1534-81) founded the modern-day township of Amritsar: in fact, the habitation came up and flourished around the *amritsar* (*sar* or the tank of *amrit* or nectar) he had got dug. Guru Arjan (1563-1606) later on got the Harimandar erected in the middle of the tank. Interestingly, the foundation of this *sanctum sanctorum* of the Sikhs was laid by Hazrat Mian Mir, a known Sufi saint, on a request by the Guru. Guru Arjan also compiled the scripture which was later installed in the Harimandar. This made the city of Amritsar a very holy place for the Sikhs as well as a rallying ground for them and their activities. Guru Arjan also became the first Sikh martyr for the sake of human freedom of conscience.

Later on, Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-75), the ninth Guru of the Sikh faith, also courted martyrdom which is unique in the religious history of mankind. He took up cudgels on behalf of the hapless Hindus on his own; it was more for redeeming freedom of faith for people irrespective of the religious tradition they belonged to. In the Indian history and folklore, he has always been remembered as the protector of the Hindu faith – a unique example of its kind in the history of mankind. Interestingly, there are several Sikh scriptural hymns criticizing *janeu* and *tilak* which the Brahmanical class had begun to consider as an end in themselves, thus giving precedence to form over the spirit of religion, but the Guru stood for freedom of belief and practice for everyone. The religious history of mankind provides no second example of a spiritual leader laying down his life for the people belonging to a religious tradition other than his own. Second, the Sikh Gurus had

nothing against Islam as such, and had the contemporary political situation in India been the other way round, Guru Tegh Bahadur would surely have made the same sacrifice for the sake of the Muslims.

The resolution by the Guru to court martyrdom was deliberate and conscious, and the authorities intervened only after he took up the challenge to undo both the evil as evil and the suffering of evil as such : the authorities felt his teachings were strengthening among the people the resolve, the determination to suffer hardships and even death rather than give up their faith under coercion. It was a peculiar situation of self-prompted and meaningful suffering for the sake of others but to uphold a cherished ideal. The Guru remained in perfect poise throughout his resolve, and his spiritual state reflecting full faith in God's will can be well imagined from a close reading of the *slokas* he is believed to have composed during the days of his captivity in Delhi. The followers who had accompanied the Guru to Delhi retained their unflinching faith in the Guru and his ideals till they were put to cruel death before the Guru's own eyes. This was like a true martyr who must meet his end in perfect poise. Interestingly, even the New Testament (John 12) while referring to Jesus' mental state on the eve of his crucifixion says that his heart felt "troubled" and Jesus himself calls it "an hour of suffering."

Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) put an end to the institution of person-Guru and instead apotheosized the Granth or more precisely the Word as contained therein as the Guru for all times to come. Another major development in the Sikh tradition during the pontificate of Guru Gobind Singh was the creation of the Khalsa on the Vaisakhi day (30 March) of AD 1699. The word '*khalsa*' has its origin in Arabic language and was those days commonly used in the revenue vocabulary : there the word stood for the crown lands under the direct

suzerainty of the King. It was in this very sense that the word came to be used in the Sikh tradition where the Khalsa is directly related to God (without the help of any intermediary). The Sikhs, following the Khalsa discipline, felt an ever nearness to God. The word '*khalsa*' is found used only once in the Sikh scripture and that too in a hymn by Kabir. Used in its plural form, the word here stands for the enlightened beings in direct mystical communion with God. Thereafter, the word is found used in a *hukamnama* by Guru Hargobind wherein it implies the addressee's direct relation with the Guru and denying any liaison role to the *masands*. Later on Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh have also used the term in some of their *hukamnamas* in the same sense.

The Sikh tradition acknowledges and respects only the ten human Gurus (from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh), and no one else, however pious or enlightened, can claim or be acknowledged as such. The Gurus are believed to have become incarnate in Word, and this makes the latter the central focus in Sikhism. This is something unlike the Christian belief wherein Word becomes incarnate in Jesus, thus making him the focus of the Christian faith. The Sikh tradition also believes in the spiritual oneness of the Gurus : they were all one in spirit though different in body.

The codex of hymns which Guru Nanak had himself prepared during his odysseys was bestowed on Guru Angad at the time of his succession. The latter added to this codex his own hymns and made it over to his successor when the time came. By the time Guru Arjan, the fifth in the line of succession, assumed office, he had perhaps two such codices with him. He edited these hymns and compiled them into one volume arranging them according to the *ragas* or musical measures and also putting them under relevant poetic metres. The work on the editing and compilation of the Granth, then

called *pothi* (or volume) but now revered as the Guru Granth Sahib, was completed on Bhadon *vadi ekam* 1661 Bikrami (1 August 1604). The Granth was installed in the newly constructed building of the Harimandar (now popularly known as the Golden Temple) on Bhadon *sudi ekam* the same year.

As it is, the Guru Granth Sahib now contains hymns by six of the ten Gurus apart from those of some holy men coming both from Hindu and Muslim traditions. Of the latter, the Hindu Bhaktas belong to different caste groups, with many of them being the so-called *sudras*. They also come from different regions of India. All the hymns in the scripture, may they be of Guru Nanak or of Kabir or Ravidas or Farid or Bhikhan, are held in equal reverence by the Sikhs. The inclusion of hymns by these people testifies to the Sikh view that truth cannot be the monopoly of any specific religion, region or caste. In other words, revelation cannot be religion-specific, region-specific and caste-specific.

Now this scripture is the presiding 'deity' in all Sikh shrines or *gurdwaras*. Let me hasten to add and emphasize here that this scripture is neither a deity nor an idol to be worshipped at an altar. It is, no doubt, the living Guru for the Sikhs and as such the object of reverence for every Sikh : they revere it but do not worship it. They seek guidance from it in all spheres of life - personal as well as social. However, it is not supposed to intercede on their behalf or to take them by miracle or as if on crutches on the path to spiritual progression. It simply shows the way, and the man is supposed to tread this path himself. The scripture, 1430 standard printing pages, begins with invocation called "Mool Mantra" and concludes with epilogue called "Mundavani" which is a kind of seal beyond which nothing can be added. A major bulk of the compositions are assigned to different *ragas* or musical

measures which are thirty-one in number. The "Ragmala" at the end following the "Mundavani" is of unknown authorship and has no thematic affinity with the preceding hymns but its addition at the end of the printed edition of the scripture has been obligatory as per the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*.

The central metaphysical doctrine of Sikhism has been the unity, the non-duality of the supreme Reality. God is one, and He has no co-equal and co-eternal. God never takes birth in human or any other form : in fact, God is not subject to birth and death, rather He transcends and subsumes *kal*. This God is the Creator of all that exists in this manifest world and is also immanent in the created phenomena. This creative aspect of God socializes the Divine and His immanence in the creation spiritualizes the mundane. God, who is one, manifests himself, *qua* spirit, in varied forms of the world. This makes the Real One look many in His varied creation : this is explained by Guru Gobind Singh by saying *ek hain anek hain/ anek hain phiri ek hain* (God is one but manifests Himself in multiplicity; despite this multiple manifestation, He remains One).

Consequently, this manifest world no more remains *mithia* or *maya* or sinful : it is declared the abode of God. Man must not renounce the world for his spiritual progression, rather he should live an active and righteous life full of filial and social obligations because these are not a hindrance in his spiritual growth, rather they help man achieve his spiritual ideal. In the same way, the human beings are essentially one with the Creator : human body is made of five perishable elements, but its life-force, the sixth element which God places within it is a divine particle. If each human being has the same divine spark within, it means that all humans are spiritually one and ethnically equal. No one should claim superiority over the other on the basis of his birth in a particular family.

The spiritual unity entails that we must not hate or injure anybody, because this would amount to hating or injuring the Lord who is immanent in each being, rather we should love all. Love for mankind is man's expression of his love of God. The feeling of love is best expressed through the deeds of *seva* or selfless service and such other philanthropic activities. What makes one good and acceptable in the Divine Court is not one's caste or family, but the deeds done during one's lifetime. It is the deeds of service done in this world which earn for man a place in the Divine Court, says the Sikh scripture. If we consider all mankind as equal, if we have feelings of mutual love for one another and if we render selfless service unto one another, it would amount to setting up of a social structure wherein values of equality, love, justice and self-dignity prevail. Instead of becoming a cause of suffering to others, people in such a set-up prefer to suffer in the suffering of others so as to relieve them of their sufferings.

Sikhism is not just a speculative philosophy but is a way of life. Therefore, the Sikh Gurus did not stop at articulating these doctrines of equality, love, justice, etc., but set up certain institutions to live these precepts in our social life. The first institution of *sangat* provided an opportunity for all, notwithstanding their social or economic status, to sit together with others on the same floor. They have been treated as equal, and anyone of them – male or female, of whatever caste or class – could lead the congregation. The place where the *sangat* congregated was called *dharamsala*, and each *dharamsala* was provided with a *langar* or community kitchen to provide food to anyone asking for it. In the *langar*, every needy person, irrespective of his caste or creed or sex, was provided food, and each who wanted to partake of food in the *langar* was supposed to sit in the row along with all others. The institution of *sangat* was later on transformed into that of Khalsa, a brotherhood,

a classless and casteless structure, and that of *dharamsala* into *gurdwara*.

Sikhism has a special concern for the poor and the oppressed. As per the Sikh metaphysics, each human is equal to the other and in His eye. Still there are some people who are socially and economically backward. Guru Nanak had a soft corner for such subaltern classes and tried to side with them and uplift them. In his hymns, he sides with the 'lowest among the lowly' and in practical social life also he always preferred to be with the poor and the low : the story of Guru Nanak putting up with poor Bhai Lalo declining the invitation of rich Malik Bhago is too well known to deserve repetition. In medieval Indian society when Sikhism originated, there were irruptions within irruptions. There was a significant group of the people who, it was decreed, could not remember God or visit any holy shrine or even listen to the scriptures. The position of woman belonging to whatever caste was deplorable, but it became quite pathetic if she happened to belong to the so-called lower or *dalit* class. In this case, she suffered for being a member of the *dalit* class/caste and also for being a woman. She was taken as an object for the use of man, but still blamed as a temptress who would lead man astray from the path of his spiritual progression. The Sikh Gurus put her on an equal pedestal with man, saying that her position was even better than man's because she is the mother of all great humans and without her this world cannot go on. In the Sikh tradition, she can take part in or lead any religious or social ceremony and there are no bars on her for being a woman.

Sikhism is not a proselytizing religion, but it has spread throughout the world courtesy the Sikh diaspora with minor exceptions of conversions in the western hemisphere. Now Sikhs can be found in almost every country of the world, and most of them are very well placed. They are identified by their

outward symbols – the turban on head which covers their unshorn hair kept neat and tidy with the help of a comb, and a tied or flowing beard. They have made themselves known through their hard work, grit, loyalty and honesty and adventure. They have been able to adjust to alien cultures and peoples because the Sikh spirit favours co-existence with other faiths and faith-communities. It accepts and appreciates other religions, their beliefs and practices, but this acceptance is critical on several counts : it condemns practices in a religion (for example, Hinduism) which provides a divine sanction for the hierarchical division of mankind on the basis of birth, and it expresses its opposition to those (for example, Islam) who used religion or religious sentiment to favour the ruling class and suppress the ordinary people.

Sikhism represents the latest stage of the evolution of the religious consciousness of mankind because it is the youngest of major world religions. Though originated in medieval Indian times, it accepts the challenges of modernity and tries to resolve them. The ethics of creative activism it recommends can pave the way for the establishment of a social structure wherein values of equality, love, compassion, dignity, justice, etc. prevail – God's Kingdom on earth. It can play a vital role in resolving the many issues arising from the modern-day pluralistic setup.

Chapter II

COMPILATION AND CANONIZATION

The Sikhs are called a people of the Book because they are followers of what is said in their Holy Volume, called the Guru Granth Sahib. Also, as we said earlier, the word '*sikh*' literally stands for a disciple who is a learner in religious discipline : this disciple is deeply attached and devoted to his Guru, the Guru Granth Sahib. This Holy Volume was first compiled under the personal supervision and care of Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru of the Sikh faith. When the appropriate moment to begin work on this stupendous project of compiling the scripture came, Guru Arjan selected a beautiful spot in a dense forest by the side of a water pond about a mile towards east from the Harimandar in the newly founded town of Amritsar. This was the place where the Guru had earlier spent some time composing his *Sukhmani*. A memorial, called Gurdwara Ramsar, stands at the place where the Guru, alongwith the scribe Bhai Gurdas, used to sit during the writing of *Sukhmani* and compilation of the scripture. The Guru took Bhai Gurdas, the well known Sikh exegete and a poet in his own right, with him to act as his amanuensis.

Why Guru Arjan Dev undertook the task of compilation of the scripture has been variously explained in different Sikh chronicles. One most commonly given argument is that the compilation and codification of the Gurus' compositions into an authorized volume was taken up so as to preserve the originality and authenticity of the genuine compositions of the Gurus by precluding all possibilities of interpolation by leaders of certain

schismatic groups who had also begun to compose hymns under the pseudonym of Nanak. However, this threat of interpolation cannot be accepted as the sole reason for Guru Arjan Dev taking up the work of compilation, though it sure was one of the important reasons. The importance of *bani* and the need for its preservation were equally important factors : it remains a fact of history that the preceding Gurus realized the importance of preserving their compositions and that they had also expressed this view in some of their hymns. Thus, we are of the view that Guru Nanak and his successors were all preserving their hymns in the form of codex/codices containing their *bani* which they would hand over to their respective successors as the time came.

Among the Sikh sources which consider the apprehension of interpolation as the sole reason for its compilation include the *Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi* (1718), Sarup Das Bhalla's *Mahima Prakash* (1776), Bhai Santokh Singh's *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* (1843) and Giani Gian Singh's *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa* (1892). The *Gurbilas* and the *Suraj Granth* are almost unanimous in their view that Guru Arjan took up the work of compilation when the apprehensions of interpolation of *kacchi bani* (unauthentic, not genuine hymns) were shared by certain Sikhs, and that the Guru borrowed the two codices containing *bani* of the preceding Gurus from Baba Mohan, elder son of Guru Amar Das, who then lived in Goindwal.

Of these two sources, the latter says that Guru Arjan Dev took up compilation only after two Sikhs spoke to the Guru about their apprehensions of interpolation whereas the former is of the view that the apprehension of interpolation expressed by a Sikh only strengthened the Guru's resolve to compile the scripture. Both these sources agree that the Guru first sent Bhai Gurdas and then Bhai Buddha to borrow the codices. Both of them called on Baba Mohan who each time refused to part with the said codices. Then the Guru himself went to Goindwal,

"sat in the street below Baba Mohan's attic and serenading him on his *tamboora*, a stringed instrument. Mohan was disarmed to hear the hymn and came downstairs with the manuscripts". The hymn included in the Guru Granth Sahib, under measure Gauri which is obviously in eulogy of Lord-God is said to have been sung by the Guru here to please and appease Baba Mohan. The Guru Granth Sahib, which is revelatory in character, cannot contain anything in praise of anyone other than God : to think otherwise is blasphemous.

Giani Gian Singh, in his *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*, differs from both the above-mentioned chronicles as to how Guru Arjan Dev got hold of the *bani* of the preceding Gurus. He says that the Guru sent out messengers with *hukamnamas* addressed to individual Sikhs as well as to congregations in areas far and near requesting them to send or bring to him any hymns of the preceding Gurus they might have in their possession. Thus, the Guru took several years collecting *bani* from different sources and then sifting the genuine from the fake. Talking of Baba Mohan, he says that the codices of hymns with him had very little *bani*. Gian Singh also makes a reference to one Bhai Bakhatu, of Jalalpur of parganah Hasan-Abdal, who is believed to have resided with the preceding Gurus and had prepared a handwritten volume of their hymns. Bakhatu, as says the *Tawarikh*, had also obtained on the manuscript *nisan* from each of the four Gurus, suggesting the authenticity of the text. The said Bhai Bakhatu responded to the Guru's message and brought the volume to his presence. The Guru, says the *Tawarikh*, marvelled at the huge size of the holy manuscript which one could carry or handle with great difficulty. This contained such a large number of hymns as it served as the source material for the scripture.

If we analyze the above two different views, we come out with several discrepancies. The first view depends on the codices with Baba Mohan, but the second view negates its significance

by saying that it had but very little *bani*. Also, both these views presume that Guru Nanak and Guru Angad Dev had given over the codices of their hymns to their respective successors as the time came. Then it does not stand to reason that Guru Amar Das did not give these over to his successor, Guru Ram Das, but instead gave them to his son, Baba Mohan. Reference to Bhai Bakhatu in the second view is obviously exaggerated. One, a codex with only the hymns of the first four Gurus cannot be so voluminous and heavy. Second, it also seems unlikely that he got signatures of all the four Gurus to the effect that the hymns recorded were authentic and genuine : Bakhatu could not possibly have lived such a long life.

Both the above views presume that the preceding Gurus did not think of preserving their hymns and even now the idea came to Guru Arjan from the Sikhs. The question now arises : if a person knows well the importance of his sayings, will he not put them into writing or take some other measures to preserve them ? Guru Nanak in one of his hymns, says that 'the message of a holy man for an individual is always actually meant for the whole mankind — *parthai sakhi maha purakh bolade sajhi sagal jahanai*. And a message could be useful for the whole mankind, only if arrangement for its preservation and propagation have been duly made. Second, preachers give discourses, poets recite poems and scholars give lectures. People come and listen to them, but almost none cares to put the spoken word to pen : only the author has to bear this responsibility if he wants to preserve his writings for posterity.

All these sources referred to above are of the view that the *bani* of the Gurus had been preserved by different devotees of their own, there being no effort on the part of the Gurus. The argument has very weak legs and does not stand to scrutiny. Guru Nanak during his lifetime travelled a lot and he visited many far-off places. He uttered several hymns during such

preaching odysseys addressing them to particular persons in some specific historical situations. In several of these situations, the person being addressed to by the Guru was obviously not sympathetic to him or his view-point. In that situation, who could write down and preserve the hymn except the Guru himself? The Guru uttered a hymn relating to the atrocities perpetrated on the masses during the invasion of Babar. At that time situation was so chaotic and people so dreadful that expecting people at that moment to write down and preserve the hymns uttered by Guru Nanak would have been asking for too much. In such situations, none except the Guru could have thought of writing down the hymns.

Among the modern writers, Dr G.B. Singh researched in this direction and put his findings in the form of a book, *Prachin Biran*. Dr Singh believes that Guru Nanak who calls himself a *shair* or poet might have preserved his *bani* in the form of a *pothi*. He cites several reasons to support his view. However, he errs thereafter when he says that Guru Nanak did not give over this codex to Bhai Lahina when he appointed him his successor, rather this *pothi* reached the hands of Baba Sri Chand after Guru Nanak's passing away. Dr Singh further says that Sri Chand also failed to realize the importance of this sacred *pothi*. Consequently, the codex was offered to the river Ravi alongwith the body of Sri Chand.

Baba Sri Chand, as the Sikh tradition stands witness, visited Guru Ram Das and later Guru Arjan Dev, and held them in high esteem. Sri Chand who passed away during the lifetime of Guru Arjan might have been aware of the fact that the Guru was compiling the scripture. If the Guru had sent messages to other Sikhs, why did he not send a similar message to Sri Chand : the Guru could not possibly be ignorant of Sri Chand having the hymns in his possession? Baba Sri Chand had patched up with the Sikh mainstream during the later

phase of his life, especially when he called on the fourth and fifth Gurus and when he requested Guru Hargobind to give him one of his sons for appointment as his successor to lead the Udasi tradition. By then the Udasis had almost substituted the *masands* to become a preaching class for the Sikhs and they did commendable work looking after the Sikh shrines during the days of their severe persecution. Since Sri Chand had by that time developed high regard for the Gurus, he would not have ignored the *pothi* or even permitted his followers to put it into the Ravi along with his body.

It does not sound convincing at all, as some scholars say, that Guru Arjan thought of compiling/canonizing the scripture only after the suggestion of a Sikh or that the preceding Gurus did not realize the importance of preserving *bani* and the idea of preserving it came to Guru Arjan only. Interpolation of *bani* by some pseudo-Gurus posed a serious problem and the preservation of its original character was an important issue, but this cannot be accepted as the sole reason for taking up the work of compilation/canonization. Therefore, we tend to agree with the other view which holds that the work of preserving/compilation of *bani* had already started with the preceding Gurus, beginning with Guru Nanak himself. They were well aware of the importance of *bani* and thus had already started the process of preserving and compiling their hymns.

The *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, universally accepted to be the oldest account of the life of Guru Nanak and a near-contemporary source to the compilation, has in it a lot to throw light on the issue of compilation of the scripture. Although the manuscript is not dated yet various scholars have considered it to be a work composed sometime towards the end of 16th or the early 17th century. The historians have testified to the veracity of most of the details of the life of the Guru, and if we extend this argument further, there is thus every possibility

of its contents regarding the compilation of the scripture also being closer to the truth.

The *Puratan Janam Sakhi* accepts the fact that Guru Nanak had during his lifetime put his hymns into written form. There are also instances when someone of the devotees, accompanying the Guru at the given time, acted as the scribe. For example, it says that the *Majh ki Var* and the *Sidh Gosti* were recorded by Bhai Saiddo Gheeho who accompanied the Guru at that time. Similarly, it mentions that *Malar ki Var* was put to pen by Hassu and Shihan who were the Guru's companions during his tour of Kashmir. Guru Nanak's stay at Kartarpur during the last years of his life was the most productive and eventful for the development of the Sikh scribal tradition. During these days many codices of Guru Nanak's *bani* were prepared by devotees for their use. It is also here that Guru Nanak asked Bhai Lahina, who later succeeded him, to recite as well as to write down the *Japu*. A modern-day scholar and exegete, Professor Sahib Singh, has also argued that Guru Nanak preserved his compositions in writing and bestowed on his successor as the time came; the following Gurus preserved this codex, added to it their own hymns and each one of them handed it over to his successor. There is also a view that the compositions of Guru Nanak were earlier recorded perhaps in different anthologies, but during his last years at Kartarpur, Bhai Lahina was entrusted the job of arranging all these compositions into a *pothi*. Thus, this first redaction of Guru Nanak's *bani*, which had been turned into a codex, was then bestowed on Guru Angad at the time of his appointment as successor to Guru Nanak.

We tend to agree with the above sources that there existed a written codex of Guru Nanak's hymns by the time he passed away and this codex he bestowed on his successor, Guru Angad. It is obviously unrealistic to believe that Guru Nanak bestowed Guruship on Bhai Lahina but did not give over to him the

notebook containing his hymns, with the implication that the said notebook perhaps went over to Baba Sri Chand. Guru Nanak, the founder of the faith, decided to continue the succession of Guruship because he knew that a continued, sustained endeavour was called for to accomplish the objective of spiritual and moral regeneration of mankind. It could not be that he might not have taken care to preserve what, as the scripture itself says, was the revealed word and what he wrote for posterity. After Guru Nanak, each of the following Gurus might also have handed over the codex/codices, comprising his own *bani* as well as of his predecessors, to his successor while bestowing spiritual succession on him.

Also, doctrinally, the Gurus were equally aware of the distinction between themselves (person of the Guru) as God's bards and the message entrusted to them, the deliverer of the message and the message itself, human Guru and the Word. Each of the immediate successors of Guru Nanak would certainly have followed the example of preserving his predecessors' codex of *bani*, adding to it his own and making it over to his successor as the time came. This implies that efforts were continuously and consistently made for the preservation of *bani* during the pontificate of the first four Gurus before Guru Arjan gave it the final shape.

There has been available enough internal evidence as well to suggest that *bani* of the preceding Gurus was available with each of the successor-Gurus. The later Gurus have composed their verses generally in the same *ragas* which were earlier used by Guru Nanak. There has been close proximity, both of thought and even of words, between some verses say of Guru Nanak and Guru Angad or Guru Amar Das or Guru Ram Das. This could have been possible only if the later Guru had the text of the *bani* of the preceding Guru with him. The aim throughout had been to preserve the *bani* as guiding principle

for mankind for all times to come and also to retain the originality of the Gurus' hymns against attempts at interpolation by the pseudo-Gurus who had begun to compose their own verses under the name Nanak. The Gurus are also believed to have codices prepared of their genuine sacred writings for subsequent circulation among *sangats* and individual devotees.

Now a brief comment on how the *bhagat-bani* was collected, selected and included in the scripture. Although among the contributors other than the Gurus, there are Sufis, Bhatts and others also along with the Bhagats, but for the sake of popular understanding all of their compositions are clubbed together as *bhagat-bani*. There is a view that the entire *bhagat-bani* has been interpolated in the post-Guru Arjan era through the intrigues of Prithi Chand and Emperor Jahangir. Thus, the entire *bhagat-bani* should, according to this view, be treated as *kacchi bani*. This view has been convincingly and thoroughly rejected by almost everybody except the followers of the Panch Khalsa Diwan of Bhasaur.

According to the *Suraj Granth* and the *Gurbilas*, these Bhagats came to Guru Arjan in their subtle bodies. They were led by Kabir and they had come to request the Guru that their verses should be also included in the Holy Volume he was going to prepare. The author of the *Tawarikh* does not seem to be clear on the issue : he refers to the two views but does not say which he believes to be true. One, the souls of these Bhagats came, presented themselves to Bhai Gurdas and dictated their hymns. Two, Guru Arjan selected the *bhagat-bani* from the *pothis* he borrowed from Baba Mohan. To us, all these views seem to be far from truth as they have been rejected by most of the scholars.

The proximity of thought between the *slokas* of Farid and of Guru Nanak shows that Guru Nanak had access to the *slokas* of Farid : in other words, the *bani* of Farid was available with Guru Nanak. The same proximity can be seen between certain hymns of Farid and those of other Gurus, of certain other

Bhagats and of the Gurus. This implies that Guru Nanak while on his preaching *udasis* might have collected and preserved *bani* of these holy men from wherever he could get. This collection might have reached the succeeding Gurus along with Guru Nanak's own composition. The following Gurus, especially Guru Arjan also might have made efforts to somehow collect such hymns and then by sifting the genuine from the fake included them in the holy volume.

Thus, it becomes apparent that history of the Sikh scriptural text is not of obscure nature and its origins are traced to Guru Nanak. No doubt, these hymns were remembered and sung by many followers but this oral tradition, also known as the *kirtan sampardai*, was neither the first method nor the only way of preserving *bani*: rather, oral tradition in Sikhism, though a popular mode, follows the scribal tradition. Guru Nanak and then his spiritual successors tended to record it on its very manifestation. We have given in the preceding pages several arguments to prove this contention. Thus, the scribal tradition was the premier tradition which flourished under the watchful eyes of the first four Gurus: in fact, scribing of volumes of *bani* had developed into a pastime with the more devout among the Sikhs. In sum, mother tradition of *gurbani* in scribal form had been an ongoing process which was co-extensive with the pontificate of the preceding Gurus and came down to Guru Arjan on his succession in a well nurtured form. No doubt, the oral tradition also continued along side the scribal tradition: the former is also known as the musical or *kirtan* tradition because it involved remembering hymns for singing. However, it had no independent origins or growth, rather it thrived purely on the scribal tradition.

We cannot say with any sense of certainty as to on which day Guru Arjan started work on the compilation of the scripture, but it is sure that Bhai Gurdas completed the job of writing down the main text of the scripture on Bhadon *vadi*

ekam Bikrami 1661 (1 August 1604). This is what we find written in the hand of Bhai Gurdas at the head of the list of contents of the *bir* or recension said to have been hand-written by Bhai Gurdas and now extant with a Sodhi family of Kartarpur. It seems Bhai Gurdas gave the date before beginning to write down the list of contents – a job which might have taken about a week or ten days to complete. The holy volume was then called *Pothi* (literally volume) or *Pothi Sahib* (*sahib* is an honorific used here as a suffix). After getting this hand-written volume duly bound, it was installed in the newly completed building of the Harimandar (now popularly known as the Golden Temple) : the Sikh tradition believes that it was Bhadon *sudi ekam* of 1661 Bikrami when the scripture was installed for the first time.

The holy volume was then called *Pothi* (literally volume) or *Pothi Sahib* (*sahib* is an honorific used here as a suffix). Bhai Buddha, a much venerated holy man in Sikh tradition, was appointed the first *granthi* or officiant. At that time it contained compositions of the first five Sikh Gurus, from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Arjan Dev, apart from those of some other holy men. It has since then remained unaltered except the inclusion of the hymns of the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur. This was done by Guru Gobind Singh in 1705 at Talwandi Sabo, also called Damdama Sahib, in the present-day Bathinda district. This Volume which Guru Gobind Singh got written in the hand of Bhai Mani Singh and which included the compositions of Guru Tegh Bahadur is no more extant today. It is widely believed that it got lost and destroyed during the *Vadda Ghallughara* or the Great Holocaust which took place on 5 February 1762 at Kup-Rahira, near Malerkotla. In this carnage, the Sikh loss of life is estimated at about 25 to 30 thousand heads.

Let us here briefly refer to the story of Bhai Banno taking the holy volume to Lahore via his village Khara Mangat and using this time to get a copy of it made without the knowledge

of Guru Arjan. This story has been refuted by various scholars in such detail as we need not repeat here the reasons for its rejection. One thing that appeals even to the simplest of mind is that Guru Arjan could not be so indifferent to the fate of such an important volume prepared after such a long labour that Bhai Banno could take as many days and months as he wished on the pretext of getting it bound. We know that Guru Arjan gave much respect to the Volume which means he might have got the work of binding done either by inviting the binder to Amritsar to do the job locally or by sending to Lahore a more reliable person like Bhai Gurdas or Baba Buddha. Moreover, we know the Volume was installed in the Harimandar soon after its compilation, the question of it being taken away by someone for such a long time does not arise. As an internal evidence indicates, the work of writing down the Banno recension was completed on Assu *vadi* 1, Bikrami 1661, i.e. exactly one month after the writing of the main text of the Kartarpur recension. Obviously, Bhai Banno or his nominees might have made the copy from the original version installed in the Harimandar.

Bhai Gurdas, the scribe, while recording the fact of completing the job of compilation, called the Holy Volume the *Pothi*. It was a little later that it came to be called the *Adi Granth* : the word *adi* means the premier as well as the eternal, and the *granth* implies the volume or the book. It was so called perhaps to distinguish and differentiate it from the volume of compositions by Guru Gobind Singh. The latter came to be called the *Dasam Granth* or the volume containing compositions of the tenth (*dasam*) Guru vis-à-vis the volume prepared earlier which was premier historically as well as in importance because it was revelatory whereas the *Dasam Granth* has by the author himself been called his 'poetic pastime'. It went through another change in nomenclature when it was called and acknowledged as the *Guru Granth Sahib* : it was in 1708 just before his passing away that Guru Gobind Singh bestowed on

it the office of the Guru. Ever since the Sikhs have considered and called it the Guru Granth Sahib.

No doubt, the Adi Granth came to be called and regarded as the Guru Granth Sahib only after Guru Gobind Singh had formally bestowed on it the office of Guru in 1708, but indications were available earlier as to this future development. There are several references within the text itself which equate the *bani* or Word with the Guru. For example, Guru Amar Das says : *vahu vahu bani nirankar hai tis jevad avar na koi* - hail, hail, the word of the Guru, which is the Lord Formless Himself; there is none other, nothing else to be reckoned equal to it. Again, Guru Ram Das, the fourth among the ten Sikh spiritual preceptors, reiterates the same as he says : *bani guru guru hai bani* - the *bani* or the Word is the Guru and the Guru is the *bani* or the Word. Guru Arjan, in one of his hymns, calls the *pothi* or volume containing the divine Word as the dwelling-place of God. In the Sikh tradition also there are instances when the person-Guru showed great reverence to the Granth Sahib or more precisely to the Word as contained therein. It is said that when the scripture was ready and it was installed in the Harimandar, Guru Arjan Dev placed it on the *manji sahib* (i.e. on a higher platform) and himself slept on the bare floor (i.e. on the lower platform). Even earlier, it is said that as the manuscript was brought to the Harimandar, the Guru himself walked barefoot as the Holy Volume was put in a palanquin.

The Holy Volume is unique among other sacred literatures of the world for certain reasons. One, it has been the only scripture among the world religions which was compiled under the personal care and supervision of the preceptor or prophet himself. Most of the other scriptures have been composed or compiled by some disciples or others much after the prophet had passed away, but the Sikh scripture was compiled under the personal care and supervision of Guru Arjan, one of the preceptors. Thus, there can never be any question about the authenticity and

genuineness of the contents of the Sikh scripture. Second, it happens to contain within it the spiritual heritage of about five hundred years. Chronologically, Sheikh Farid, one of the contributors to the scripture, has been the first having been born in 1173, and Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs who courted martyrdom in 1675, has been the last. Third, its editorial scheme has been such as to preclude any possibility of later interpolations. It has withstood the tests of time, and so far its contents have remained safe from any such attempt. Four, it is unique among the scriptural literature of the world over in that it contains hymns of holy men coming from its own traditions as well as from others. Interestingly, all these hymns may they be of Guru Nanak or of Kabir or of Ravidas or of Farid are held equal in importance and reverence. Also, this is perhaps the most voluminous poetic anthology of medieval times. Last though not the least, this scripture has the rare distinction of having been bestowed on it the title of the Guru. The followers acknowledge the scripture as their living Guru, and any injury or harm to it has invariably been taken a harm or injury to a living being.

After canonization and codification by Guru Arjan, any change in the scripture was neither permissible nor possible. The opinion held by some that the work of compilation and editing of hymns went on even after the canonization of the scripture by Guru Arjan is obviously an attempt at misleading. There is an effort at justifying this contention by referring to the plethora of different recensions which were prepared in the following years. While examining such recensions, we must, as we said earlier, keep in mind that transmission of *bani* in the pre- and post-Guru Arjan period continued through various different ways and means : parallel to the main Sikh scribal tradition, the Udasi, Bhalla and Mina traditions had been active throughout resulting in the production of various manuscripts which were not strictly canonical but aimed at serving their respective sectarian interests. These traditions were in the ascendancy especially when the Sikh

Gurus shifted from the central Punjab to the Sivalik hills. Such manuscripts should have become redundant and lost all religious significance for the Sikhs after the codification of the scripture. The only change after canonization by Guru Arjan that has been accepted in the Sikh tradition is the addition of Guru Tegh Bahadur's hymns by Guru Gobind Singh around 1705.

However, unfortunately, none of the manuscripts belonging to mainstream Sikh scribal tradition of the pre-Adi Granth period is extant today, but the disappearance of such valuable sources can be well understood if and when we study the history of Sikhs during the first half of the eighteenth century when prices were fixed on their heads, uttering of the name of the Guru was prohibited and reading of *bani* of Guru Nanak was considered to be a taboo; anyone found disobeying this decree was liable to be arrested and his belly ripped open. No one, however devout, could those days think of preserving this rich heritage.

The entire corpus of *bani* available in the present printed form of the Guru Granth Sahib is sacred to the Sikhs. It comprises 1430 standard pages and has been divided into three different sections. The first section, comprising the first thirteen printed pages of the scripture comprises *banis* not assigned to any particular musical measure and which also form part of the daily regimen of a Sikh. The second section, the major part of the scripture (pp. 14-1352), comprises thirty-one sub-sections, each given to a *raga*. Each sub-section begins with the hymns of Guru Nanak followed by those of the successive Gurus and the bhagats and others. The third section, also not assigned to any *ragas*, contains various compositions titled after various poetic meters : thus, these compositions are also called metrical compositions. In this section are also included some *bani* by Bhagats, Bhatts (*swaiyyas*) apart from some compositions by the Gurus. It concludes with Guru Arjan's *Mundavani* which literally means seal beyond which nothing can be added.

Chapter III

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

In its present form, the Guru Granth Sahib contains hymns of six of the ten Gurus of the Sikh faith and those of some holy men from other traditions including Hinduism and Islam. Among those coming from the Hindu tradition mostly belong to the Bhakti movement and they include Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, Trilochan, Jaideva, Dhanna, *et al.* In this category are also included the Bhattas who composed *swaiyyas* eulogizing the Gurus, and Rai Balwand and Satta, two bards, who used to sing hymns in the court of Guru Arjan and who also composed a *var* in Ramkali measure which apart from other things stresses the spiritual oneness of all the Gurus. Those from the Muslim background are the famous Sufi saint, Shaikh Farid, and Bhikhan. There is another category in which we can include persons coming from the Gurus' families and others who were otherwise closely connected with the Gurus, and this includes Baba Sundar, the great-grandson of Guru Amar Das, who contributed one *Sadu* included in the Guru Granth Sahib under Ramkali measure and Bhai Mardana who accompanied Guru Nanak on his preaching odysseys. All these contributors other than the Gurus are popularly called Bhagats, and the *bani* of all these contributors is generally clubbed under one nomenclature *bhagat-bani*. Theologically, all the scriptural hymns, may they be of Guru Nanak or Farid or Kabir or Ravidas are held in equal respect by the Sikhs : none is superior or inferior to the other. These hymns of the Gurus as well as

of the Bhagats as a whole constitute the *bani* which has been given the status of the Guru, the Guru Eternal for the Sikhs.

As it is, the scripture now available in printed form comprises 1430 standard pages. For the sake of accuracy of the printed text and for the sake of showing due respect to the Word while under print, the rights to publish it are vested only in the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, the supreme democratically-elected body of the Sikhs for the management of their shrines which also looks after their religious affairs. The entire scripture is in verse, most of which is assigned to various *ragas* though there are a few verses which have not been assigned to any particular *raga*. The total corpus in a way represents the spiritual heritage of India from 12th to 17th centuries : Sheikh Farid who was born in 1173 happens to be chronologically the first author, and Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs who courted martyrdom in 1675 is chronologically the last. The contributors other than the Gurus belong to different parts of India and come of different caste groups including the *sudras*. Ideological affinity was the sole criterion for the choice of *bani* of these latter authors.

If we have a look at the scriptures and scriptural literature of other religious traditions, we shall find that the writer/scribe before beginning with the main body of his work invariably invokes God or some deity to seek the latter's blessings for the successful completion of his venture. In secular literature also the same practice has been prevalent. In the latter case, however, such an invocation is used both to seek Divine blessings as well as to secure financial assistance/rewards from the human patron. Even in our daily routine, a religious person would begin each of his ventures even to the small job of writing a letter with an invocation. If the work – may it be of spiritual or secular content – happened to be divided into several sections and sub-sections, the practice has been to repeat

the invocation at the head of each section and even sub-section. Sometimes the invocation was also repeated when the author/scribe's job was half way through. However, it was the prerogative of the author whether he wanted to use the invocation in full or in part at any of the above given places.

The word 'om' or 'oan' is invocatory and it has been used in the beginning of the Vedas and the Upanishads. No doubt, such an invocation has been made in the beginning of Vedantic and other later Puranic literature, but in the case of the former such an invocation is not formally under any such title. However, in the case of the later Puranic literature which includes the Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc., use of such invocation was universally popular. The poet would either invoke the Supreme Lord or the Hindu goddess of knowledge, Sarswati, and some other deity. In the beginning of the Islamic scripture, the Quran, an invocation is made to the Lord-God which reads as follows: *bismillah-i-rahmanurrahim* (O Compassionate Lord, I begin with Thy grace).

The Sikh scripture opens with what is popularly called the *Mul Mantra*: it is not given any title – either *Mul Mantra* or Invocation or any other. The text of the *Mul Mantra* comprises a few words/terms suggesting the attributes of God as articulated by the founder of the Sikh faith. Transliterated into Roman script, the text of the *Mul Mantra* would run as follows:

Ik Oankar Satinam(u) Karta Purakh(u) Nirbhau Nirvair
Akal Murat(i) Ajuni Saibhang Gurprasad(i).

A free rendering into English of the above text would mean that the Creator-Lord is one; Call Him Eternal Truth; He is the Supreme Creator-Being who is immanent in the creation; He knows no fear and is at enmity with none; His Being is formless and beyond time; He is not subject to birth in any form; He is self-existent; and it is only through the grace

of the Divine that one can realize Him. For a detailed discussion on the concept of God in Sikhism, see Chapter V.

It seems the *Mul Mantra* has been used here as an instructional invocation : in this kind of invocation, the author sings praises of what he is going to deal with in the following text. This invocation thus also introduces the person or thing the author/authors is/are going to deal with in the coming pages. The 'invocation' here eulogizes God as articulated by Guru Nanak, and this Real One in all its aspects and with all its immenseness was to be the subject-matter of the following text of the scripture. We also find this *Mul Mantra* repeated at the head of different sections and sub-sections of the scripture, but it is found written in five different forms – sometimes in full and sometimes in various abbreviated forms.

No doubt, the scripture as such stands as a one single whole, but an analysis of its structure reveals that there are in between the prologue (*Mul Mantra* – invocation) and the epilogue (*Mundavani* – the prayer of thankfulness) at the end, thirty-three sections and various sub-sections. The first of these thirty-three sections following the *Mul Mantra* comprises the first thirteen printed pages and contains liturgical *bani*s not assigned to any particular *raga* or musical measure. The hymns included in the first section include *Japu(ji)*, *So Daru* (which forms part of the *Japuji* and of the *Rahiras*, and then appears independently in *Asa raga*), *So Purakh* which also is part of the evening prayer *Rahiras* and *Sohila* (popularly called the *Kirtan Sohila* and the *bani* to be recited daily at bedtime). All these compositions also form part of the daily routine of a Sikh.

The following thirty-one sections are assigned to a *raga* each. When Guru Arjan first compiled the scripture, it had only thirty *ragas*, and *raga* Jaijawanti in which only Guru Tegh Bahadur composed his hymns came to be added when Guru Gobind Singh made the latter part of the scripture. These

thirty-one *ragas* are as follows : Siri, Majh, Gauri, Asa, Gujari, Devgandhari, Bihagara, Vadhans, Sorath, Dhanasari, Jaitsari, Todi, Bairari, Tilang, Suhi, Bilawal, Gaund, Ramkali, Nat Narain, Mali Gaura, Maru, Tukhari, Kedara, Bhairau, Basant, Sarang, Malar, Kanara, Kalian, Parbhati and Jaijawanti. Each of these *ragas* is to be sung at a particular given time during specific season. Of these thirty-one *ragas*, Guru Nanak has composed hymns in nineteen *ragas*; Guru Angad has composed only *slokas* and these have not been assigned to any specific *ragas*; Guru Amar Das has his *bani* composed in seventeen *ragas*; Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan have both composed *bani* in twenty *ragas*, each; and Guru Tegh Bahadur's *bani* is available in fifteen *ragas*. Similarly, the *bani* of Kabir and Namdev is found included in the scripture under eighteen *ragas*, of Ravidas under sixteen *ragas*, of Trilochan and Beni under three *ragas*, of Dhanna, Jaidev and Farid under two *ragas* each, and of Bhikhan, Sain, Pipa, Sadhna, Surdas and Parmanand under only one *raga*.

Some musicologists hold that the Sikh/Gurmat music has a unique character and is different from the Indian classical music while some others are of the view that the Gurmat music is based on the Indian classical music. The resolution of this controversy does not fall within the purview of this monograph, but we must state here that the scripture does not denote the theory of any particular *raga*, but the *ragas* are specified only through their titles. Second, unlike the Indian classical music which dominates the text being sung, music in Sikh tradition is subordinate to the word/*bani*.

This part of the scripture, which is assigned to various *ragas*, constitutes the major bulk of the corpus. All the *raga*-sections have almost the similar structure : each such section opens on a fresh folio/page and begins with the *Mul Mantra*. After this each typical *raga*-section is broadly divided into two

parts - the first carries the hymns of the Gurus and the second comprises *bhagat-bani*, i.e. hymns of contributors other than the Gurus. Each part has several sub-sections, and each sub-section begins with the *Mul Mantra* in its full or abbreviated form and comprises hymns of different authors under one poetic *genre*. For example, the first sub-section begins with the *padas*, first of Guru Nanak, followed by those of his successive spiritual successors. Then follows *bani* in another poetic *genre* comprising the same order author-wise. The order of the *genres* included in the scripture begins with the *padas* (including *ikpada*, *dupada*, *tipada*, *chaupada*, *panjpada*, *chhipada* and *astpadi*) and is followed by *chhant*, miscellaneous smaller compositions, larger compositions and *Vars* coming at the end. Since all the Gurus composed hymns under the pseudonym of Nanak, Guru Arjan has put Mahla I, II, III and so on at the head of these hymns to indicate the specific authorship of a given hymn : here Mahla I stands for the first Guru, Guru Nanak, and Mahla II for the second Guru, Guru Angad, and so on.

In the beginning of each *raga*-section, as we said, are varied *padas*. *Ikpada* means a *pada* or a hymn with one unit, *dupada* means a hymn comprising two units, and *tipada*, *chaupada*, *panchpad* and *chhipada* mean hymns with three, four, five and six units, respectively. However, the title *chaupada* has been used for *padas* with four units as well as for *padas* with less than four units but each unit having four lines. In *astpadi* or octave no specific rhyme-scheme or measure has been assigned nor any burden is prescribed for these *padas*, but all the stanzas have to be in the same metre and measure. Lines in each stanza are generally rhymed. In the Sikh scripture, for example, the *astpadis* are composed in different *ragas* and metres : Guru Nanak's *astpadis* are found in *ragas* Gauri (*chaupai* metre) and Maru (*nishani* metre) whereas Guru

Arjan's *Sukhmani* has twenty-four *astpadis* in *raga Gauri* (*chaupai* metre). In the *Sukhmani*, each of the eight stanzas comprises ten verses, but the number of verses in a stanza elsewhere is restricted from two to four lines.

The sub-section on *padas* in each *raga*-section is followed by those comprising *chhants* which have three different forms : one, the *chhant* comprises five units and each unit has six verses, and they have no *slokas* prefixed to them (see Mahla IV, *Siri raga*). Second, the first among these *chhants* has a *sloka* prefixed to it whereas the others have none (see Mahla V, *Bilaval raga*). Third, the *chhant* has five units and each unit is preceded by five *slokas* (see Mahla V, *Siri raga*). These *padas* as well as *chhants* are of different authorship and their author-wise order is the same as stated earlier.

Then follows the sub-section comprising miscellaneous compositions which being smaller in size have been categorized separate from the longer compositions but which have their own independent titles and thus cannot form part of *padas* also. These smaller compositions include *Pahre*, *Din Rain*, *Thiti*, *Ruti*, *Karhale*, *Birhare*, *Ghorian*, *Alahnian*, *Kafi*, *Anjulan*, *Gunwanti*, etc. The composition *Pahre* advises man, with the help of a metaphor of *vanjara* or trader, to be honest in his social dealings and behaviour, and traverse life always mindful of the Creator, the union with whom is his ultimate objective. There are three different compositions, one each by Guru Nanak, Guru Arjan and Kabir, under the title *Thiti*, which literally denotes a day/date of the lunar cycle of the month. In the scripture, it denounces the Brahminical notion that one day for being associated with some deity is more propitious than the others : all days are auspicious if devoted to God's remembrance and to good deeds. The composition *Ruti*, by Guru Arjan, portrays the human urge to meet God, and this yearning is said to change from season to season. There are

several other such smaller compositions, each advising man to remember God and discard formalism as that would lead to nowhere.

The compositions such as *Karhale*, *Birhare*, *Ghorian*, *Alahanian* and *Anjulian* are the titles taken from the Punjabi folklore. *Karhale* is the title given to two compositions, by Guru Ram Das, in the scripture: the word *karhala* (singular form of the plural *karhale*) is of Sindhi origin and there it stands for a camel. In these hymns, the term applies to the human *man* or mind) which keeps wandering restlessly. The camel-like self is advised to seek the company of the holy, to heed the counsel of the Guru and be ever mindful of God. *Ghorian*, literally plural of *ghori* or mare, is the title given to hymns by Guru Ram Das composed in the mould of a folk song of marriage. The *Ghorian* in Punjabi folk poetry are a type of lyrical songs sung by the sisters of the groom on the occasion of marriage. These hymns teach that human life is a precious opportunity to get united to God as marriage is the opportunity to get united with the groom. *Alahnian*, by Guru Nanak, is dirge (*siapa*), a song of mourning sung at the time of death of a dear and near one in which the dead person is eulogized. Guru Nanak adopted this folk form to proclaim the will of God and, by implication, to deprecate the custom of *siapa* and *alahanian*. One must not give way to idle wailing, but learn to accept what has been ordained by the Almighty. The *Anjulian* is literally a prosodic form as well as the title of two hymns by Guru Arjan. The main theme of these hymns is that everything in this world happens under Divine Will and that the tragedy of man is that he seeks happiness in material life sans any spiritual reference.

Towards the end of each sub-section are longer compositions followed by *vars*. These longer compositions include the *Baramahas*, *Bavan Akhari*, *Sukhmani*, *Oankar*, *Sidh Gosti*, etc. *Baramaha* is also a form of folk poetry in which the

emotions and yearnings of the human heart are expressed in terms of the changing moods of Nature over the twelve months of the year. There are two compositions under this title, one by Guru Arjan under *raga* Majh and the other by Guru Nanak under *raga* Tukhari. However, the Sikh Gurus for the first time transformed the theme of love in this poetic genre into that of spiritual import. The *Bavan Akhari* is the title which in early Sanskrit literature was given to a poem constructed upon fifty-two (*bavan*) letters (*akhar*) of the Devnagari alphabet. There are two compositions under this title in the Guru Granth Sahib, one by Guru Arjan and the other by Kabir. The *Sukhmani*, by Guru Arjan, is a very popular composition which many Sikhs love to recite daily as they believe that its recitation provides *sukh* or comfort. The *Oankaru*, by Guru Nanak, is again in the form of an acrostic, each of its stanza beginning with one of the letters of the Devnagari script. The poem denounces renunciation and favours following the path shown by the Guru and remain united with God while performing familial and social responsibilities. It advises man to bring his actions in consonance with his professions. Guru Nanak's *Sidha Gosti* is a kind of discourse or dialogue between the Guru and the *sidhas*. It brings out the Sikh teachings and way of life vis-à-vis the *sidha's* philosophy and way of life.

In these sub-sections, the concluding composition is the *var* if there is one in the given *raga*. There are a total of twenty-two *vars* included in the scripture : of them, one is by the bards Satta and Balwand whereas others are the works of the Gurus – Guru Nanak has contributed three *vars*, Guru Amar Das four, Guru Ram Das eight and Guru Arjan six *vars* in different *ragas*. The *vars* by Guru Nanak are in *ragas* Majh, Asa and Malar; those of Guru Amar Das are in *ragas* Gujri, Suhi, Ramkali and Maru; those of Guru Ram Das are in *ragas* Siri, Gauri, Bihagara, Vadhans, Sorth, Bilawal, Sarang and Kanra; and

Guru Arjan's *vars* are found in *ragas* Gauri, Gujari, Jaitsari, Ramkali, Maru and Basant. Earlier the *var* used to deal with the theme of battles and dynastic feuds, issues of honour fought at the point of sword and romantic love, but the Gurus brought about a complete transformation in the subject matter of this genre. They have employed this poetic form for spiritual and ethical themes wherein the battle ground shifts to man's psyche and the battle is fought between the forces of Good and Evil which the former win through the Guru's help and guidance. The human patron of secular *vars* has been replaced by the Divine One Who is eulogized throughout.

After the *bani*s of the Gurus (*padas*, *chhants* and the titled compositions including both the smaller and the longer ones) in each *raga*-section is included what we popularly call Bhagat-bani, the compositions of various saints and bhagats (other than the Sikh Gurus). This section begins with the verses of Kabir and is followed by those of Namdev, Ravidas, Jaideva and so on. Interestingly, order is strictly followed in the case of the *bani* of the Gurus, but in the case of Bhagats the order is not strictly chronological. The reason may be the uncertainty about their years : scholars have not been unanimous as to the dates of these contributor-Bhagats even till date. The hymns of the Bhagats are not found in all the *ragas*, and scholars hold different opinions as regards the question whether they did or did not indicate the *raga* at the head of their compositions or they just composed verses in different poetic metres, and not in any *ragas*. It seems some of them might have indicated *ragas* and in the case where *raga* was not indicated Guru Arjan might have used his editorial prerogative to assign those verses to the appropriate *ragas*.

Following these thirty-one sections assigned to different *ragas*, we again have a section comprising miscellaneous compositions which are not assigned to any particular *raga* but

have been composed in different poetic metres. We call them metrical compositions because they all have been titled after various poetic metres. This section (1353-1430) begins with the *Sahaskriti Slokas* by Guru Nanak (4) and Guru Arjan (67) and concludes with the *Ragmala*. In between these two compositions are placed the *Gatha*, *Phunhe*, *Chaubole*, *slokas* by Kabir (243) and Farid (130) and *swaiyyas* both by the Gurus and various Bhatts.

The *Gatha*, by Guru Arjan, constitutes twenty-four verses in which God is eulogized and the importance of devotion to Him stressed. It is the discourse on Name Divine which serves as an arrow to pierce the 'five enemies' and efface pride. The scriptural composition titled *Phunhe*, in the mould of folk songs under the same title, expresses a woman's longing for her Spouse. Her lips are unable to utter His beauty which is unparalleled. She has tried all the sixteen embellishments known to women but without Him all are in vain. She dedicates her life and all its embellishments to Him and hopes to receive Him on the couch of her heart. The *swaiyyas* by the Bhatts are in eulogy of the Gurus, emphasizing their spiritual oneness. Of these the number of *swaiyyas* in eulogy of Guru Nanak and Guru Angad are ten each, those in eulogy of Guru Amar Das twenty-two, those in eulogy of Guru Ram Das sixty and those in praise of Guru Arjan are twenty-one. Then follow the *slokas* – the ones which could not be accommodated in the *vars* and those by Guru Tegh Bahadur. The number of these *slokas* is as follows : Guru Nanak's thirty-three, Guru Amar Das's sixty-seven, Guru Ram Das's thirty, Guru Arjan's twenty-two and Guru Tegh Bahadur's fifty-seven. Generally, a *sloka* comprises two lines, but at places its length varies and goes upto sixteen lines. The *sloka* has also been used both in the longer (e.g. *Sukhmani*, *Bavan Akhari*, etc.) and the smaller miscellaneous (*Pahre*, etc.) compositions, but in such compositions it occupies

a secondary place whereas the relevant composition enjoys the primary importance. In the *bani* not assigned to any *ragas*, *sloka* enjoys an independent place.

“*Rahau*” has a very significant place in Gurmat music : that is why we find it used only in the compositions assigned to different *ragas*, and not in the others. It comprises the verse or verses which the singers repeat at regular intervals while singing the composition wherein it occurs. It is also said that the verses titled “*rahau*” contain the central idea, the essence of the relevant composition. The ‘*Rahau* verses’ in the *Sukhmani* are generally believed to contain the essence of the *bani*. Similarly, the ‘*Rahau* verses’ in the beginning of the *Sidh Gosti* also reflect the author’s ideology which stands resolved in the following text with the help of questions and answers. This can be illustrated by numerous examples from other compositions in the scripture. It has also been said that while explaining a hymn, one should begin with an explanation of the ‘*Rahau* verse(s)’ : this would make the exegete’s job much simpler and the listener will also be able to comprehend the meaning easily. There are hymns in the scripture which contain more than one *Rahau*. It has been explained that if there are two ‘*Rahau* verses’, the first one is the question and the second gives the answer. There are also instances of more than two verses of *Rahau* – actually they go up to six at some places. In all these cases the *Rahau* verses help us understand the relevant hymn. In the case of *vars*, *rahau* occurs only in one such var – *Var Ramkali Mahla III*, and here it is meant to be sung after the recitation of each stanza of the *var*.

Guru Arjan’s *Mundavani* which follows is a sort of epilogue to the scripture. The exegetes have interpreted the word ‘*mundavani*’ variously. Some take it to mean a riddle while more commonly it is taken as seal or stamp : by affixing his seal to the holy writ, the Guru precluded the possibility of

any apocryphal additions. It has two parts : in the first part, the scripture has metaphorically been referred to as 'a salver containing three articles – truth, contentment and contemplation. Then the fourth viand is mentioned – the nectar of Name Divine which sustains all. He who partakes of this fare is saved. This thing cannot be discarded and, therefore, man should ever keep it enshrined in his mind. By repairing to the Lord's feet alone can one swim across the world-ocean : this entire visible world is the Lord's manifestation.' The second part which is a *sloka* by Guru Arjan is a sort of thanksgiving prayer. Herein the Guru recites the paen while rendering his gratitude : 'I knew not what great favour Thou had done by making me worthy of this task; Meritless am I – without merit, and Thou took pity on me; That was Thine own mercy and Thou rained benedictions on me : I have now met with the True Guru; My body and soul flourish only if I get the gift of Thy Name.'

However, as it happens, the scripture in its present printed form concludes with the *Ragmala*, lit. a rosary of *ragas* : this is the title of a composition of twelve verses, running into sixty lines written as a table to the index of *ragas*. The authorship of the *Ragmala* has been a matter of controversy and how it came to be added to the scripture has so far remained a mystery but it is no doubt a fact it is found appended to most of the manuscript copies of the scripture including the one at Kartarpur. Of course, it has no thematical affinity or integrity with the other compositions of the scripture, and its contents have no spiritual or instructional significance. The *Sikh Rahit Maryada* or the Sikh Code of Conduct which generally governs the Sikh way of life has unfortunately refused to take a clear-cut position on the issue. It is strange that such a vital document should remain undecided on such a crucial issue as to whether a particular composition is a part of the scripture or not.

Controversy about whether the Ragmala is an integral part of the scripture or not has been raising its head off and on in the past too. Giani Gurdit Singh, in his book on the Guru Granth Sahib, records two such occasions – one in 1907 in Kuala Lumpur and then in 1917 in Nairobi. On both the occasions, the author says, the matter was referred to the Chief Khalsa Diwan which ruled that Ragmala was not *bani*. He also seems to suggest that the general consensus among the Sikhs at large and various Sikh theologians and holy men during the Akali Movement of the early twentieth century was also against it. Max Arthur Macauliffe also holds that the Sikh scripture comes to an end with the *Mundavani* and that any addition thereafter has been spurious and invalid. However, as it is, the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* prescribes that the printed version of the scripture must carry the *Ragmala*, though the question of its recitation along with the preceding hymns has been left to the local practice.

Guru Arjan who compiled the scripture has adopted a very meticulous method of numbering the hymns so as to negate every possibility of interpolation and to clarify the quantum of *bani* composed by a particular author in any given *raga*. The system followed is so worked out that a monograph like this is not sufficient to explain, in some detail, with all its intricacies and complexities.

Thus, the scripture of the Sikh faith is unique in the sense that it was compiled and canonized by one of the preceptors of the faith during his lifetime and under his personal supervision; second, its hymns have been so numbered as to preclude any possibility of apocryphal interpolation. It follows the standard pattern of beginning with an invocation and concluding with a prayer of thanksgiving. This invocation introduces us to the subject-matter being dealt with in the coming pages. The prayer of thankfulness is a part of the hymn

titled *mundavani* which is also taken as a seal beyond which nothing can be added. Like the invocatory *Mul Mantra*, *Mundavani* also tries to sum up the contents of the scripture as a whole. The sections and sub-sections in between are meticulously planned, hymns first divided into *ragas*, and then arranged metre-wise as well as author-wise, each one of the sections or sub-sections beginning with the invocation, in its full or abridged form. Although these sections and sub-sections are assigned to different *ragas* yet in Sikh tradition word dominates the music. The scripture has since been acknowledged as the medium of revelation descending through the Gurus. All ideals, institutions and rituals derive their meaning from it. It makes and moulds the Sikh concept of life, is central to all that happens in the Sikh life and is the presiding deity in all Sikh shrines the world over.

Chapter IV

GURU GRANTH SAHIB AS GURU

A scripture is both the result and the foundation of the belief-systems of a religion. It is the result because it verbalizes the revelation as experienced^{*} by the prophets or preceptors of that faith. It is perceived to be the foundation because this revelatory experience, as uttered in mundane language, becomes the permanent point of reference for the creedal articulations of the given religion. We have used the words 'perceived to be' because the real foundation of the religion is the experience as recorded in the scripture. Besides, the scripture is also normative as it serves as the basis of the code of conduct and ethics for the followers as well as the bond to keep the community together. The former helps in the creation of a social set-up wherein prevail the values of equality and love, justice and self-respect, compassion and altruism. The latter provides the follower-community a distinct identity.

Guru Granth Sahib is the name given to the Sikh scripture which contains the revelatory hymns, called *bani* or *sabd*, of six of the ten Gurus and certain holy men coming from the Hindu and Muslim traditions. This is available in printed form, in 1430 standard printed pages. It is published by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, and is titled *Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. The work on its compilation and editing get completed in 1661 Bikrami/1 August 2004 and though it contains several internal evidences to the effect that Word is Guru yet it came to be so accepted

and acknowledged only when Guru Gobind Singh apotheosized it just before his passing away in 1708. However, strictly speaking, it has not been the scripture as such but the Word as contained therein which has been declared the Guru.

There have been some schismatic groups within Sikhism which refuse to accept the fact of the scripture being given the status of the Gurus. For example, the Kukas or Namdharis preferred to have their eleventh and twelfth person Gurus even though they paid reverence to the scripture as well. The recent mushroom growth of *deras* with largely the Sikh following is also a dangerous development. In the name of the propagation of the Gurus' message, the leaders of these *deras* pose as person Gurus and in the process prescribe a *rahit* or code for their followers different from other Sikhs. This distorts the Sikh theology and causes schism among the community for the reasons that this deviates from the Sikh belief in ten person Gurus and in the Word (Guru Granth Sahib) thereafter. Thus the community gets divided into small schismatic groups and goes astray from the true Sikh spirit. This trend needs to be rectified and we need take several steps to this end. But in the present context, it would suffice to present certain empirical evidences to the effect that Guru Gobind Singh put to an end the institution of person-Guru and instead bestowed the office of Guru for all times to come on the scripture.

There have been available several contemporary sources which testify to this fact. One such source is an entry in the *Bhatt Vahi Talauda Parganah Jind*. A free rendering into English of an entry in this *Vahi* would read as follows :

Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Maser, son of Guru Tegh Bahadur, grandson of Guru Hargobind, greatgrandson of Guru Arjan, of the family of Guru Ram Das, Surajbansi Gosal clan, Sodhi Khatri, resident of Anandpur, *parganah* Kahlur, now at Nanded, on the Godavari bank in the Deccan,

asked Bhai Daya Singh, on Wednesday, *shukla chauth* of the month of Kartik, 1765 Bikrami [16 October 1708], to fetch the Granth Sahib. The Guru placed before it five pice and a coconut and bowed his head before it. He said to the congregation : 'It is my commandment : "Own Sri Granth Ji in my place. He who so acknowledges it will obtain his reward. The Guru will rescue him. Know this as the truth."' "

The Bhatts have been hereditary panegyrists, genealogists or family bards, and they came into the Sikh fold in significant numbers at the time of Guru Arjan Dev. Some of them recorded events of the lives of the Gurus in their scrolls called *Vahis*. Some of these scrolls are extant even to this day in some Bhatt families, especially at the village of Karsindhu in Jind district. The script is called *Bhatakshari* - a kind of family code like *lande* and *mahajani*. According to Giani Garja Singh, the only known scholar to have worked on these manuscripts, the author of this entry, quoted above, is one Narbud Singh Bhatt who was with Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded at that time.

The second such testimony is a letter issued by reference of Guru Gobind Singh's wife Mata Sundri. This letter, still preserved with a family of Bhai Rupa village in Bathinda district, exhorts all Sikhs to have faith only in ten human preceptors; to believe in any other human preceptor is called a mortal sin. The letter goes on further to say : "Go only to the Ten Gurus in search of the Word.... The Guru resides in *sabda*. The Lord hath merged His own self in the Guru through whom He has revealed His Word. The Word is the life of all life, for, through it, one experiences God." The letter also makes a clear injunction against Ajit Singh (the adopted son of Mata Sundri) posing as Guru and some among the followers of Banda Singh Bahadur acknowledging their leader as Guru.

Bhai Nand Lal, one of the court poets of Guru Gobind Singh, in his *Rahitnama*, i.e. code of conduct, also testifies to

the above fact. Nand Lal, who is believed to have spent long years at Anandpur and who has been known for his elegant Persian poetry, was at that time also at Nanded, though now in the camp of Emperor Bahadur Shah as his minister. An epilogue at the end of his *Rahitnama* sums up the last words of the Guru as follows :

He who would wish to see the Guru,
 Let him come and see the Granth.
 He who would wish to speak with him,
 Let him read and reflect upon what says the Granth.
 He who would wish to hear his word,
 Let him with all his herd read the Granth,
 Or listen to the Granth being recited.

Bhai Prahlad Singh is another of Guru Gobind Singh's disciples who has also composed a *Rahitnama*, or code of conduct, wherein he records the commandment of the Guru in the following words :

By the word of the Timeless One
 Has the Khalsa been manifested.
 This is my commandment for all my Sikhs :
 You will acknowledge Granth as the Guru.

There have been some contemporary non-Sikh sources as well which testify to this fact. One such example is the Sanskrit manuscript *Nanakandrodayamahakavyam* by Devaraja Sharma : this has been published some years back in book form by the Sanskrit University, Varanasi. All these and several such other sources coupled with the strong Sikh tradition reiterate our statement that after the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, the scripture, now called Guru Granth Sahib, has been the Guru for all times to come for the Sikhs.

Guru Granth Sahib is, thus, not just a scripture, a holy book, or an anthology of hymns for the Sikhs : it is a lot different and much more. It is the spiritual mentor, the

preceptor, the living Guru for the Sikhs. They hold it in deep respect, but do not worship it. Any injury or harm to it is invariably taken as an injury or harm to a living being. It is the presiding deity in all Sikh shrines but it is not the object of worship at an altar. It is the guiding principle for a Sikh in all spheres of life : he seeks guidance from and prays to it while starting a new venture, for the successful completion of an auspicious ceremony in one's life or family, to tide over a crisis in individual or communal life, and so on.

In the Sikh tradition, Guru stands as much for the human teacher or preceptor as for the Divine, and we find the word used in both the senses. As a human preceptor, Guru in Sikh tradition means the ten spiritual preceptors, from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh; no other person however pious or enlightened can claim or be accepted as such. Thereafter, it has been the *bani* or the Word uttered by the Gurus which has been called and acknowledged as Guru. It is the Gurus' Word, believed to be divine revelation, which leads man on the way to *mukti*. Since the Word as communicated by the ten spiritual preceptors and as contained in the scripture is Divine, the Sikh tradition sometimes uses the words God (the source of the Word or revelation), the Word (divine message) and Guru (the instrument used by the Divine to communicate that message to mankind) as synonyms. No doubt, at places in the Sikh scripture, Guru stands as much for the human teacher or preceptor as for Divine and we find the word used in both the senses. However, this identification of the Guru with God is not the identification of the person of the Guru with God, but Guru conceived as *sabda* or word as revealed by Him.

In the Sikh tradition the Guru as a person is neither God nor God's incarnation. There have been repeated references in the scripture to the effect that God never incarnates in any form : the idea of divine incarnation has been strongly rejected

in Sikhism. The Gurus nowhere claim any such status for themselves. On the other hand, Guru Nanak calls himself one among the 'lowly among the lowliest' and a *shair* or poet eulogizing the Divine. Guru Gobind Singh, in his autobiographical *Bachitra Natak*, is quite unequivocal as he asks his followers that he be not treated or taken as God : he who calls him God must suffer the pangs of hell, he warns. Rather Guru Gobind Singh calls himself the son and slave of God. Obviously, this idea of God's son must not be confused with the Christian view of Jesus being the son of God. The Sikh tradition takes the Gurus to be perfectly realized souls whom God selected as His instruments so as to communicate His Word to mankind in general. It is through them that God's word or revelation enters human history because it is through them that God's word is revealed. In other words, Guru is the voice of God, God's self-revelation. He is, no doubt, a vital link in man's spiritual progress, but he only shows man the way : he is only the exemplar and the guide, but the man has to tread the path himself. In fact, the scripture reiterates that the guidance of the Guru is so essential that no spiritual gain can come without it. But he is not an intercessor and, as such, does not take the disciple to a higher stage of spirituality as if on crutches or through miracle.

In the Sikh tradition, it is believed that the body of the Guru has been the repository of the Light Divine. This body has been the medium for the articulation of the Divine Word or the revelation as it came from God. So this body is worthy of reverence, but what deserves a devotee's worship is the Word or the divine Word. That is why in Sikhism the Guru is an object of veneration but not a deity to worship. The historical Guru or the person-Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, were the focal point of the congregations and the living examples of the truth they happened to bring to light through

the divine revelation. They received the divine message, articulated it and communicated it to the mankind in mundane language and they themselves lived upto the message they imparted to others. Thus, they were important as objects of our reverence, but of real importance is the Word coming through them.

To understand the true nature of the Guru in Sikhism, a special figure is employed to describe the transference of the office of the Guru. The Guruship passes from one Guru to the other as one candle lights another. The metaphor has two connotations : one, the real and true Guru is God who is the source of all light. Second, Guru is not to be confused with the human form, i.e. the unlit body : it is the light within that is important. The Sikh exegetes have given various connotations to the word Guru, depending on the different etymological interpretations. The most common connotation, accepted in Sikhism has been that Guru is the banisher of darkness (*gu* stands for darkness and *ru* for its removal). It is the guidance and help of the Guru which enlightens one by removing the darkness of ignorance.

Since the scripture is not a systematic philosophical treatise, we do not find any specific text or texts dealing with the concept of the Guru, though there are numerous references scattered throughout the scripture expressing the importance and role of the Guru. Among the most often used metaphors for him are the *tirath* or the place of holy pilgrimage, the *khevat* or the one who takes man across the world-ocean, *dipak* or the lamp which lights up the entire world, *joti* or the light which illumines the world, *data* or the donor of wisdom, *paras* or the philosopher's touch stone which turns even the base material into gold, *sura* or the hero whose sword of knowledge rends the veil of darkness, and so on.

In the scripture, the Guru and the Sabda or Word are also

juxtaposed. They have also been used synonymously and also as one word, i.e. *sabdaguru*. The word *sabda*, taken from Sanskrit but of obscure etymology, can be rendered as sound, voice, utterance, speech or the word. In the distinctive Sikh usage, it stands for any hymn or composition as found included in the Guru Granth Sahib. Here it stands for the word or message or revelation as it came to the Gurus direct from God. As the *sabda* in the Sikh context is believed to be spoken by God, it implies the voice or the utterance is divine. And the utterances as received from the Lord are communicated in mundane language by the Guru for the benefit of the mankind. This means that the word or *sabda* originally belongs to God and that the Guru is only the instrument or the vehicle through which it is articulated and communicated. As we said above, Guru Nanak calls his own speech as *khasam ki bani* or the utterance of the Lord. Similarly, the following Gurus also reiterate Guru Nanak's view with minor differences in phraseology. Since the Divine voice and the *joti* within the person of the Guru are the same in essence, the scripture identifies one with the other – *bani guru guru hai bani* (*bani* or the utterances of the Guru are the Guru, and Guru is what he utters), says Guru Ram Das.

The above implies that the historical Gurus of the Sikh faith uttered whatever they received from the Lord God. There are several hymns in the scripture testifying to the fact that they uttered only the Word as received from God – *jaisi mai avai khasam ki bani taisara kari gian ve lalo* (O Lalo, I proclaim the Lord's Word as it comes to me), says Guru Nanak. Thus, in this sense, God Himself becomes the primal Guru of the whole creation, and this Guru chooses certain persons to act as His instruments. This is how Guru Nanak, in his *Sidh Gosti*, refers to God as his Guru. "God has placed Himself within the Guru, which He explicitly explains," says the scripture (466). Since

God's chosen ones remain ever in tune with the supreme Being, the scripture accepts God as residing within the Guru. Thus, Guru, God and Word (God's Word made manifest through the Guru) are used interchangeably in the scripture.

The Guru is sent by God but he is not the incarnation of God, as we have said in the preceding pages. The two most important attributes of God declared in the scripture are His being *ajuni* (not subject to birth) and *saibhan* (self-existent or not created or born of any external agency). Thus, God is never born in any form whatsoever. The scripture very severely condemns those who believe in the idea of Divine incarnation. There are always in human society people who are not but only pretend as *gurus* or *pirs* or holy men of some or the other denomination. The scripture calls such people blind guides, traders in ignorance and superstition, and so on. For example, at one place the scripture denounces those self-proclaimed *gurus* and *pirs* who go begging and are parasites on the society. The humankind is advised not to fall at the feet of such people because a blind *guru* or *pir* cannot lead his disciple on the path to spiritual progression. On the contrary, the Sikh scripture holds that an enlightened person who knows the true way of life can never be a parasite, rather he makes an honest earning with the sweat of his brow and shares it with the needy. We ought to be wary of the self-proclaimed *babas* and *sants* who tend to be hedonic, preferring material comforts at the expense of simple austere life given to moral and spiritual values and who try to cover up their lack of spirituality with an aura of worldly grandeur.

In sum, Sikhism accepts *sabd* as Guru. There are several references in the scripture to the effect that *sabd* or *bani* is the Guru. Guru Arjan has also equated *pothi* (the volume that contained the divine word) with God – *pothi parmesar ka thanu* (Pothi is the dwelling-place of God). We have also instances

from Sikh history and tradition when the person-Guru placed the Granth or to the word as contained in the Granth in a position superior to himself. This, no doubt, implies that the Granth or *pothi* enjoyed from the very day of its compilation a respected position because it contained the divine word. However, during the lifetime of the ten Gurus, the person-Gurus remained the main focus of the devotees' faith because they were living examples of the truth they brought to light through revelation. After Guru Gobind Singh put an end to the succession of person-Gurus, the place of the Guru came to be occupied by the Word or the Word as contained in the Granth. To say that this position was bestowed on the scripture later on by the community out of some historical necessity is to misread the history and misguide the masses. However, Guru in Sikhism does not take man to a position of higher spirituality as if by miracle or on a crutch : he simply guides who shows seekers the path and the seeker has to tread the path himself.

Chapter V

THE SIKH WORLD-VIEW

The Sikh scripture is an attempt to put into mundane language intelligible to people in a particular spatio-cultural context what has been revealed to the preceptors and what they uttered without any addition or alteration on their part. These utterances prescribe as well as describe the human ideal : the scripture as a whole also provides the general framework of structure in which that ideal is to be achieved. The Khalsa as created by Guru Gobind Singh in fulfilment of Guru Nanak's mission is the agency to which the task of this social transformation has been endowed. However, both the structure and the agency must function in harmony to bring about peace and co-existence, love and compassion, equality and justice in human social affairs.

Sikhism is a way of life lived according to the world-view enunciated by its spiritual preceptors in their hymns as contained in the scripture. As we have said in the preceding pages, the *bani* or Word as contained in the scripture is considered revelatory in character and this enjoys the status of Guru or spiritual preceptor for the Sikhs. The Sikhs are supposed to live their lives in accordance with the teachings enshrined in the *bani* and under the guidance of this Word-Guru. That is why the scripture is taken as a kind of constitution, a sort of framework of structure according to which the task of socio-political and religious transformation is to be accomplished.

The scripture is not a formal philosophical treatise dealing in different sections with different aspects of life. It is an anthology of inspirational poetry, revelatory in character. Nevertheless, one can easily come across repeated allusions to various metaphysical concepts and doctrines and values which concern and affect man. In the following pages, we shall take up some of the major concepts and doctrines so as to bring out the Sikh perception of God, man and the world as well as their relationship *inter se*. We shall also try to touch upon some of the important moral and ethical values man must imbibe and also the evils which hinder man from taking the right path. Human spiritual ideal, the ways and means to achieve it and the obstacles in the way of man try to realize this ideal will also be taken up.

In the Guru Granth Sahib the supreme Reality is revealed through the revelatory experiences of Guru Nanak who had the first-hand experience of It in his mystic state of consciousness as detailed in the *Bein* episode of his life. To him, God is self-evident, and thus no proof or effort is required to prove or establish the divine existence. Guru Arjan Dev makes it rather explicit when he says that God has been apparently obvious—*nanak ka patisah disai jahara*. Guru Gobind Singh, in his *Jap* which also forms part of the daily regimen of prayers of a Sikh, also emphasizes that God is *hajra hajur* and *zahra zahur*, i.e. apparently obvious. The Gurus take God to be so obvious, so outstandingly visible that they make no effort, rather feel no need, to prove His existence. God is perceived to be manifest in all the material phenomena around us, present in all the directions and at all the places. However, this does not equate God with or limit Him to the manifest material phenomena. The latter are in essence divine but they fail to contain the Divine in Its entirety.

There is in the Sikh scripture much emphasis on the unity

of Reality : plurality of deities is straightaway rejected. The scripture opens with the term *ik oankar*, a term which occurs many times in the following text. The frequent use of the term is suggestive of the significant and central place the concept of the unity of God occupies in Sikh ontology. The term *ik oankar* is, in fact, a compound of three words, i.e. *ik*, *oan* (or *om*) and *kar*. The word *oan* or *om* stands for the supreme Reality and has been so used in the medieval Indian religious literature. In the *Upanisadic* literature also, the word *om* has been used to convey the means of meditation as well as the object of it : here the word describes both the supreme means of meditation and the goal to be reached by the meditation itself. The Sikh Gurus have invariably used the word with the prefix '*ik*' and suffix '*kar*'. In fact, the prefix '*ik*' is not a word, but a numeral and as such is very specific and certain in its meaning. There can never be any ambiguity about the meaning of a numeral whereas different words or phrases could be interpreted differently by different persons to give them different meanings. On the other hand, the meaning of a numeral is ever fixed for all. Guru Nanak has therefore used the prefix '*ik*' to emphasize the oneness, non-duality of God. The addition of prefix '*ik*' by Guru Nanak to the Hindu term *oan* or *om* is significant as the Sikh perception of God is unitary as against the Hindu belief in the plurality of Godhead. Obviously, this is also against the *sramanic* tradition which altogether denies the existence of God.

The use of suffix '*kar*' to '*oan*' is not a new innovation in Sikhism as it had already been used in some *Upanisadic* literature as well. However, the use is significant as it implies creation, thereby bringing about the *sagun* aspect of the transcendent, *nirgun* God. This suffix is indicative of the creative aspect of God who does not remain static but becomes dynamic as Creator and Sustainer of the manifest material world. There have been numerous references in the scripture

suggesting the creative aspect of the Reality : God has been referred to as Karta Purakh who, of His own will and from His own self, has created the entire manifest phenomena.

Thus, the term *ik oankar* means the non-dual unity of God (*ik*) which was earlier in unmanifest state (*oan*) but later on willed Himself to manifestation or creation (*kar*). The term in this sense also happens to occupy a three-dimensional connotation. One, it stresses the unity, the oneness of the metaphysical Reality called God. The manifest reality in all its plurality must not be taken as duality. Second, it refers to the unmanifest, formless (*nirankar*, *nirgun*) state which is also called the impersonal unity of the Reality. Third, it points to the creative aspect of Reality, implying His manifestation, *qua* spirit, in all beings and at all places. In other words, we can also say that *ik oankar* stands for the non-dual dynamic God who wills Himself from Being to Becoming, and thus becomes transcendent as well as immanent.

In Hinduism there is a trinity of gods - Brahma, Visnu and Siva - which is responsible, respectively, for the creation, preservation and destruction of all that exists in this universe. Unlike this, the Sikh Gurus have perceived the Real One as the one spiritual continuum solely responsible for the creation, preservation and re-absorption unto Himself of the entire manifest phenomena. Thus, they perceive Him as transcendent as well as immanent, stressing equally on both the aspects and declaring that neither aspect is more important than the other. They are also quite specific in their reiteration that this immanence of God in the plurality of beings and things of the material world does not in any way affect either its unitary character or its transcendent nature. God in His unmanifest state is transcendent as well as *nirgun* : in this state, He is beyond human comprehension. But when He manifests Himself, *qua* spirit, in the material phenomena, He becomes immanent as

well as *sagun* : it is this aspect of God that we as humans try to understand. Since the entire manifest phenomena does not exhaust God in His entirety, the human understanding of Him is ever incomplete. That is perhaps why Guru Nanak in his *Mul Mantra* while giving different attributive names of God calls him Karta Purakh (Creator Being). However, the Sikh conception of *purakh* is different from that of the *purusha* of the Sankhya-yoga system : the latter is not only inactive but is also dualistic from *prakriti*, but the former here is active and internally related to the nature or *qudrat*. He is the dynamic principle and the *qudrat* or nature is His manifest form, the immanent aspect of the transcendent Karta (Creator).

This self-manifestation of God is under the self-regulative cosmic principle (*hukm*), and can be seen in the whole of the creation. All the creatures born of seed (*setaj*), egg (*andaj*), foetus (*jeraj*) and earth (*utbhuj*), all the four directions, the earth and the sky, day and night, and the sun and the moon all emanate from Him. The Lord is present (in spirit, though) on the earth and in the sea and everywhere else : the Creator-Lord can be perceived in the multiplicity of creation yet He retains His unity, says Guru Nanak – *jal thal mahial puria suami sirjanharlanik bhanti hoi pasaria nanak ekankar*. He takes many forms – *ek murat anek darsan*. Guru Gobind Singh also stresses the point as he says, in his *Akal Ustati*, that the Real One is immanent in all beings and at all places – *sarab joti ke bich samana/sabhahun sarab thaur pahichana*. However, this multiple manifestation does not affect or change God's unitary character – *ek hain anek hain/anek hain phiri ek hain* (God is one (*ik*) but He becomes visible in a variety of material forms (*anek*); despite this multiplicity of manifestation, He is ever One.

The essential oneness of the creation and the Creator leaves no place for dualism. The Gurus reject both the static metaphysical system of Vedanta and the Semitic concept of the

transcendental (impersonal) nature of God. The Sankha theory of dualism between *Purusa* and *Prakriti* is also rejected. Unlike these metaphysical systems, the Sikh dynamic ontology, on the one hand, encompasses the 'otherness' of created elements within the all-comprehensive structure of non-dual Real One, and on the other, identifies with Himself, *qua* spirit, all sentient and non-sentient elements. These latter are visualized as manifest units of the Real One. Thus, the entire manifest phenomenon becomes intrinsically one with God and is realized as a relative reality.

The inherent potentiality of self-manifestation of God does not restrict itself to the act of creation alone, but also extends to the preservation and destruction as well. He creates, preserves and finally reabsorbs everything unto Himself. As for God being the preserver of His creation, we find in the Guru Granth Sahib various attributes used for Him indicating His concern, love, justice and compassion for His creation. He has been given various epithets taken from familial relations such as *mata* (mother), *pita* (father), *sakha* (friend), *data* (giver), *palak* or *palanhar* (preserver), *piara* (the loved one), and so on : in our mundane life all these relations are supposed to bring us up and take care of our wellbeing. This Creator and Preserver God is also the destroyer of all that He creates. All the different forms and shapes emanate from Him, live their brief worldly existence and finally merge within Him. The metaphor repeatedly used in the Sikh scripture is that of the waves which arise from water and ultimately merge in it. Guru Gobind Singh, in his *Akal Ustati*, uses an extended metaphor to explain this relationship between *jivatma* (individual soul) and *paramatma* (supreme Soul) :

As out of a single fire
Millions of sparks arise;
Arise in separation

But come together again
When they fall back in fire.

As from a heap of dust
Grains of dust swept up
Fill the air, and filling it
Fall in the heap of dust.

As from a single stream
Countless waves rise up;
And, being water, fall
Back in water again.

So from God's form emerge
Alive and inanimate things;
And since they rise from Him,
They shall fall in Him again.

Let it also be made explicit that this divine manifestation, preservation and re-absorption is not selective : it is universal. His spirit permeates through all and He is inseparable (*abigami*) from His creation.

God is, no doubt, Creator of everything, but He Himself is self-existent and self-effulgent. He was in existence when none else existed : other creation came into existence when the unmanifest, impersonal God willed self-manifestation. In Sikh philosophy, this process has been called a transformation from being or pure consciousness to becoming or manifestation in real historical time. Thus, the entire manifest phenomena including man and all other forms are a part of this becoming. In the scripture, He has been called *saibhan* or self-created. Though everything else has His spirit (*joti*) manifested in it, no other or outside spirit manifests in Him. He has no father or mother as we normal human beings have, and He depends on no outside source for His existence. He was even when nothing else existed except chaos and darkness, He is and He shall ever be. Another allied term with *saibhan* that is used for God is *ajuni* which means unborn or unincarnated. He is never

born in human or any other form. He is free from the cycle of transmigration.

We have learnt that God is the sole Creator and all else is His creation. The Creator-creation relationship has in the scripture been suggested by the examples of sea water and waves, sun and sun rays, and so on. The waves can never become equal to the sea and the rays can never equal the sun, similarly the creation is ever subservient to the Creator : the former cannot become equal to Him. Thus, God is all-powerful, unequalled and there is absolutely no check on Him except His own self-regulative creative principle (*hukm*). He does not depend on anything else for His existence and survival. He is without any rivals (*nirsarik*) and without any relations (*nirsak*). Therefore, He fears none (fearless or *nirbhau*). Since He has created the entire world of phenomena, the created beings are His own children who ever function under His will. He need not have enmity towards His own children, rather He has, in the scripture, been called 'master of the patrons of the poor and the hapless' – *anath nath nath hai*. This perception of God as fearless and rancourless is unlike the anthropomorphic and polytheistic tribal gods of the earlier Indian traditions. These latter are found many times engrossed in mutual enmity and hatred. In Hindu mythology also, we find many gods either in fear of some other god or trying to hold others in fear. Sometimes these gods are also shown as in fear of and even defeated by the demonic forces. However, the Sikh concept of God takes Him above these sectarian and tribal considerations and rather makes Him belong to the entire creation : He is immanent in the whole of mankind and feels for the whole of it.

The scripture also calls God *akal* (*akal* means beyond and not subject to *kal*, i.e. time and death) *murati* (being). The word *kal* means time and death, and the addition of the prefix

a to it on the one hand turns the noun into adjective and on the other gives it a negative connotation, thus implying one beyond and not subject to *kal*. God of the Sikh conception had been before time, is beyond time and will ever be. Unlike all other created beings who in their embodied form exist in historical time are subject to death and decay, God never gets embodied as He is never born in any form and is beyond all these limitations of death and decay. In other words, God in his unmanifest, impersonal aspect transcends *kal* but His manifestations are immanent in time. Let it be stressed here that God transcends temporality and encompasses *kal*, but it is neither exclusive of time nor timeless, rather it subsumes *kal*.

Such a non-dual and dynamic God has been called *Satinam*, a term which combined two words, i.e. *sati* (literally, true or truth) and *nam* (name). It has been interpreted as the 'manifestation of the Indeterminate Absolute as determinate Infinity in the creative act as spirit.' Also, *nam* is a primordial *sakti* which is the material and efficient cause of the manifest world, and such a *sakti* is naturally *sat* or true. In fact, in Sikh metaphysics, *nam* is the divine cause of manifestation, means for truth-realization (*nam-simran*) and the Truth itself (*sati-namu*). It has been the only food on which the saintly feed themselves, says the scripture.

Such God can only be realized through the grace of the Guru. The word Guru here does not stand for any personal *guru*, but for the Primal Lord : it can also be given the name of *sabda brahman* or the Divine Word, and thus referring to the impersonal aspect of God. *Sabda* is the creative principle which acts upon the consciousness of man leading him on the way to spiritual development and ultimately to God-realization. This process of self-development (spiritual as well as ethico-moral) constitutes the realm of grace when the individual will becomes attuned to the will of God and thus realizes Him.

Some of the earlier Indian religious traditions negate the self as well as the world : they hold man and the manifest material world as unreal, calling it *mithia* or *maya*. They also advised man to free himself from its snare so as to get united with the Absolute One. This world and worldly life were considered a hindrance in the way to God-realization : in fact, freedom from this snare was considered a pre-requisite to accomplish the spiritual ideal of human life. On the other hand, the Sikh scripture, based as it is on the intuitive experiences of the Gurus, presents a different world-view. According to this world-view, the mundane world and all the beings who inhabit it including man are in essence one with God : the immanence of God in all the creation lends it a spiritual nature. The creation no more remains an independent entity distinct from God, rather it gets identified with God's self-revelation. Thus, the earlier idea of this material manifest world being *mithia* or *maya* which hinders man's spiritual progression stands negated. The world no more need be renounced, says the scripture. On the other hand, we can see the dominant overtones of divinizing the mundane domesticity by declaring this mundane world as the abode of the Lord.

Both man and matter are not, according to the Sikh scripture, illusions : they are realities, relative realities though. Man is not only the central figure in the whole universe but is also the supreme creation among the numberless creations of God. His status is the highest and he is at the head of all living beings : all other beings are subordinate to him – even the gods long to be born as humans, says the scripture. Man is called the supreme being because only he has the consciousness to discriminate (*bibek*) between good and evil. This consciousness is a pre-requisite to reach the stage of self-realization or God-realization. All religions and philosophies revolve around him, and no religion or philosophy can exist

or be complete without referring to, analyzing and establishing the nature and purpose of human life.

As for this manifest mundane world, the scripture says that in the beginning there was complete darkness, and nothing existed except God :

In the beginning there was indescribable darkness;
 There was neither earth nor heaven,
 Nothing but God's unequalled Being.
 There was neither day nor night, nor moon nor sun;
 God alone was there in a meditative mood.
 There was no source of life, voices, wind or water,
 Neither creation nor destruction, nor coming nor going.

....

There was no *Brahma*, *Visnu* or *Siva*,
 None existed but the One Lord.

Complete absence of any material *a priori* to the creation of this material world supports the theory that God constructed the world and all that inhabits it out of His own self and of His own will. When the Divine will began to work and how it operates is not known to any human mind : only He who created it knows – *thiti var na jogi janai ruti mahu na koilja karta sirathi kau saje ape janai soi*. However, when God created this world, He made Himself immanent in it. His immanence in the mundane world results in the spiritualization of the material reality. This world becomes the dwelling-place of God, and since God resides in this world, man must not renounce it, rather efforts be made to transform it into *sach khand* or the Kingdom of God on earth. This presence of Divine in this manifest world implies that this world is also true like its Creator, though it is not everlasting like Him. Since God is believed to be present in the created phenomena, the idea of searching for Him in forests and mountains is futile : it is like going away from God. This forms the basis of the Sikh stress on householder's life *vis-à-vis* asceticism. Rejecting the idea of

life-negation and world-negation, the scripture advises man to aspire and strive for his spiritual ideal while living a normal life of familial and social obligations. Instead of renouncing the world, man must have total commitment to God and should ever remember Him as the sole power in each being and behind each action. He should ever feel and realize His presence in each being and at every place. This would mean spiritual enlightenment or inward illumination having its natural corollary in a certain specified social behaviour marked by the values of love, equality, justice, altruism, service, etc.

In this manifest world which is relatively true, man is both the central figure and the supreme creation among the numberless creations of God. His status is the highest also because he is the only conscious being with the potential to develop his consciousness to such a level as to realize his true self and achieve mystical oneness with the Divine. Like other creation, man is also, in essence, divine : there are references in the Sikh scripture to the effect that human body is made of five perishable material elements but God has put in it a sixth element which is the life force of body and which is not perishable like the other five elements which constitute the body. This everlasting sixth element, called *atman*, is also called a divine particle. Thus, human body becomes the temple of God, and the scripture advises man to keep it pure – in thought, word and deed. It is this body which is going to serve as means for the soul to realize God. This explains for the Sikh preference for the proper upkeep of body rather than put it to any hard penances.

Let this be clarified here that human soul is divine in nature, but it is not identical with Divine. The often quoted example in the Indian religious literature to connote the difference or relationship between individual soul and the supreme Soul is that of sea water and the water contained in a

pitcher. The scripture also uses the example of sea water and the waves : the latter are born of the water, but show their distinct existence for a while only to merge back into the sea water. The human soul is essentially related to the supreme Soul, gets separated from it to live brief bodily existence(s) and to finally coalesce with it. The scripture explains it by saying that God places his *joti* in human body, human being lives a short span of life in the mundane world to realize his divine potential and then this *joti* once again is reabsorbed in its original source.

However, I must hasten to add that the divine presence in the created phenomena is *qua* spirit, it is not physical. In fact, the Sikh metaphysics stresses the unity of God and He is taken as one, with no co-equal. He is self-existent and the only One not subject to *kal* or time. Thus, the idea of divine incarnation in human or in any other form is rejected. This manifest world and all that we find in this world including humans, gods, *et al.* are all creations of God who is not only the Creator of everything and every being but is also immanent in the creation, thus lending them essential divinity. As creator, He is transcendent but He becomes immanent as He manifests Himself, as Spirit, in His creation. In the transcendent state, He is formless (*nirakar*) and without attributes (*nirgun*) but assumes attributes (*sagun*) as He manifests himself in different forms of His creation.

An important postulate of Sikh metaphysics as articulated in the scripture is the belief in *avagavan* or transmigration of soul. Man is born in this world, lives a specific span of life and passes away. All this happens under the divine Will like everything else taking place in the world. Sikhism does not adhere to the theory of certain gods in charge of birth and of death. It is the supreme One under whose will everything moves. Dharamraj and Jamduts, the angels of death in Hindu metaphysics and mythology, are either spoken of as destructive

forces of nature or brought in while discussing the beliefs of other traditions. Similarly, *Chit* and *Gupt*, two angels in Hindu mythology responsible for recording all actions, good as well as evil, of man, have not been accepted as reality: they represent conscious and unconscious actions of man. The physical death of man and, for that matter, of other beings does not mean the total annihilation because the essence within being divine is eternal. It only implies change of one manifest form into another.

Every deed done by man, every word uttered by him and even every thought that came to his mind, may that be good or bad, conscious or unconscious, leaves behind an impress which clings to him. Dharamraj represents the idea of the divine reckoning of man's deeds. Man's present birth is influenced by the *karma* of his past lives, and the *karma* of his present life are bound to influence his future. He puts on the garb of this body according to the action of his past life. In other words, we can say that the principle of transmigration is directed by the quality of human action, and the human birth is attributed to the quality of the actions of the previous existence and the state of the soul at the time of death. Thus, the idea of transmigration is ethically-oriented, and rebirth in a particular life or shape is the result of the quality of one's actions – good actions leading to the sovereign human birth whereas bad actions leading to animal or other lower existence.

The idea of divine immanence in each human being gives birth to the Sikh doctrine of the spiritual unity and ethnic equality of mankind: all humans are spiritually united with Creator-God, and all of them are equal among themselves. This idea of equality in Sikhism is all-inclusive and makes no distinctions between man and man on any basis whatsoever. Sikhism makes no distinction between people of different castes, creeds and classes, and between man and woman. This

is unlike the Hindu view of humans having emerged from different organs of *Brahman*, thus there being inherent inequality amongst them. Among other Indian religions, for example, the Digambar sect of Jainism considers woman unworthy of attaining liberation : they believe that she must by her noble *karma* secure the birth in male form to realize the ideal of liberation. This indispensable condition of male life for release does not hold good in Sikhism which makes no distinction between man and woman in this regard. In fact, where man's highest status among all other beings is confirmed in the scripture and wherein he is said to be at the helm of all living beings, the person addressed in the hymn is in the feminine gender.

What according to the Sikh metaphysics is the spiritual ideal of man ? It is neither the acquisition of a kingdom nor the achievement of *mukti* or liberation – the former is the highest objective man can aspire for in mundane life whereas the latter is the highest spiritual ideal according to most of the world religions. Rather the ideal before the Sikh is love for God. And, the Sikh way of life shows that there is no inherent mutual contradiction between love for the Divine *vis-à-vis* liberation. Man's union with Divine in an expression of selfless love implies a stage of consciousness when he lives a bodily existence in this world but is ever mystically one with God. When such a man discards his bodily vestures, his soul coalesces with the Divine and he is free from the process of transmigration. The former stage is *jivan-mukti* and the latter *videh mukti*. In other words, the former is synonymous with love for the Divine and the latter is a natural corollary of the former. This explains the Sikh preference for the former. As for the Sikh preference for Divine love *vis-à-vis raj*, we must emphasize that it does not imply renunciation of the world : Sikhism rejects both extremes of asceticism and hedonism, and rather exhorts man to live an active and robust but a righteous and contented social life.

The Sikh concept of God being that of an ultimate Reality which is indescribable and incomprehensible, *nirakar* and *nirgun*, how can one express one's love for the formless God and how can one become the object of His love and grace? If the former is the Sikh spiritual ideal, the answer to the latter can be found in the Sikh way of life. The Sikh metaphysics stresses along side the unity of God the spiritual unity and ethnic equality of man. God is the Creator of all, and implicitly all humans have within them the same divine particle. There is considered no inherent inequality among mankind, whatever their apparent differences caused by regional and cultural reasons. On the other hand, all human beings are taken as essentially one with God and equal among themselves as well as in His eye. Man has to realize this spiritual unity and ethnic equality because the best way to love God or realize God is to love the mankind, the creation of God.

The idea of love, equality, etc. is just not an intra-religious issue in Sikh thought, rather it extends these values to the inter-religious and inter-community relations as well. In modern-day society of religious and cultural pluralism, man must learn to live and live peacefully with other faiths and faith-communities. The attitude of religious exclusivism is sure to cause bad blood in inter-religious relations which no one can today afford because, as says Hans Kung, there can be no peace among the nations without peace among religions. Sikhism is a pluralistic religion which acknowledges the validity and genuineness of each faith and appreciates all prophets irrespective of their spatio-cultural affiliations. It does not condemn any scripture, rather condemns those who do not reflect on them and act upon them. No doubt, it is critical of some of the arid and effete practices prevalent in some traditions. It rejects polemic, and instead recommends dialogue to sort out intra-religious or inter-religious issues. It recommends first listening to the ideas

and views of the other before expressing your own. We need to revive the spirit, I stress the spirit, of institutions like *sarbat khalsa* and *gurmata*.

Man is in essence one with God, but in his ignorance and under the influence of *haumai*, he fails to realize this essential oneness, rather he develops an egotistical attitude of dualism. This causes his differentiation from God and consequently from other human beings. *Haumai* makes man degenerate – spiritually as well as morally. Spiritually, it keeps *jivatma* separated from the *paramatma*, thus keeping it in bondage leading to man's continued transmigration; socially, it causes man's differentiation from other beings leading to strife among individuals, communities and nations. This alienation, both spiritual and social, denotes a mental state, a sort of veiling of the consciousness of man, resulting in man's duality from God as well as from other beings. Such a person is called *manmukh* or self-oriented in the scripture. However, the scripture calls *haumai* two-pronged : it is both the malady and the remedy. It is flexible to lean to the other side as well – towards God, to feel His presence and realize His will. In this situation, the veil of darkness thins away and the malady gets transformed into remedy and blessing. The darkness of ignorance is gone, sense of duality ceases and man can see and realize the Lord. This identification of the individual will with the divine will makes man happy and healthy in mind and person – *khudi miti tab sukh bhae mana tana bhae aroga*, says the scripture.

The pentad of evils – *kam*, *krodh*, *lobh*, *moh* and *ahankar* – are the corollaries of *haumai*, and there are numerous such other references in the scripture where these five are referred to in a variety of ways; at places it also makes reference to certain other evils along with these and they include *kusangat*, *trishna*, *ninda* and others. Man is advised to guard himself against these evils which 'break into the human body and

plunder the nectar of Divine Name'. All actions performed under the influence of *haumai* or its correlates go against the will of God whereas it becomes man to make continuous volitional efforts to negate the individual will's egoity vis-à-vis the Divine will and instead identify the former with the latter. This connotes a mental state when man gives credit for whatever he does to the Divine. Following the tenets of the scripture, he feels and realizes the divine presence in all places and beings and he is ever sure of the Divine working through him in all his social actions and behaviour. This identification of two wills also implies one's spiritual unity with Divine as well as with other human beings.

The scripture recommends *nam-simran* as the only means to achieve this end. For this man will have to eradicate *haumai* because it stands in binary opposition to *nam*. No doubt, *nam-simran* has been a key concept in the scripture, but it has not been explicitly defined or explained anywhere therein. We agree that like any other feeling, it is also beyond perfect definition yet different scholars have given different definitions. It is certainly not the repetition of one or the other names of God or just reciting one *bani* or the other. Of course, reading and reciting *bani* is necessary but it has to be followed by understanding of the text and then by trying to live those precepts in one's social life.

As we said earlier, God in Sikhism is both transcendent and immanent, *sagun* (with attributes) and *nirgun* (without attributes). Human mind has invented various attributes for God because the object of his love and adoration whom he has to remember and attune himself with must obviously be a personalized entity. However, this entity in Sikh metaphysics is not a deity : the idea of idol-worship or divine incarnation stands rejected in Sikhism. On this spiritual sojourn, man needs the guidance and help of the Guru. The guidance and

help of the Guru is essential but this does not mean taking the seeker to a higher stage of spirituality as if by miracle or on a crutch. The Guru simply guides, but the seeker has to tread the path himself. Man can do so by following the Guru's advice and not by a mere affirmation of faith in a particular Guru. In other words, Guru does not intercede with the Divine on behalf of man, but gives him the blessings of *nam-simran* which can transform the *niane* (ignorant ones) into *siane* (enlightened ones), which can help man progress inwardly and outwardly.

The last but a very crucial factor in enabling man realize the ultimate ideal is the divine grace. Of course, Sikhism does not view divine grace in isolation from human love for God which is best expressed through deeds of love and altruism for mankind in general. Implicitly, human endeavours become complementary to divine grace for the attainment of spiritual objective, thus distinguishing it from the Christian concept which treats it as all-inclusive and self-sufficient. In Sikhism, the pre-requisite is no doubt divine grace because it blesses man with the perception that enables him to understand the Word and thus discern God within and around himself. The Divine grace reveals the way, Guru guides him on the way, but it is the man who has to tread that path, who has to participate in social activity – sharing his perception with others and in the process cleansing the society of all evils and building a social structure which is conducive to let this perception flourish. In fact, it is this human quest, human endeavour which leads to the spiritual ideal revealed to man by the divine initiative. This has been beautifully explained in the *Japu(ji)* with the help of Panj Khands wherein the seeker's quest ends with his arrival in Sach Khand, the last and the apex of the integrated multi-dimensional progress where he realizes oneness with God as also with entire mankind.

Chapter VI

TOWARDS A CULTURE OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Religious pluralism as a fact of human existence is as old as the religious history of mankind : the founders of almost all the major world religions were born and lived in pluralistic situations. In spite of this we can still call it a newly experienced reality because in the past people lived secure in their own tiny and isolated religious camps, least concerned with the issue of plurality of religions and the allied theological and social problems, but today the world has become physically one, a global village. In this practical situation, man cannot run away from or wish away the social reality of religious pluralism and the social and theological issues arising from it. In the modern-day world, we must realize, as says Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith in his *The Faith of Other Men* (1962) that "the religious life of mankind from now on, if it is to be lived at all, will be lived in a context of religious pluralism. This is true for all of us."

While defining as to what constitutes a pluralist society, Furnvill in his *Colonial Policy and Practice* (1948), calls it a "medley of peoples...for they mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit." Each sticks to

his own identity and ideology, though none in this 'small global village' can afford to live in isolation from the other. Different religions and cultures are face to face with one another : each of them must preserve its distinct identity without, of course, affording to live in a perpetual state of tension and clash.

The UNESCO, in its Report entitled "Our Creative Diversity" (1995) acknowledges the relevance of pluralism and stresses the need to live with the plurality of religions and cultures. The religious and cultural diversity is 'behind us, around us and before us' says Levi-Strauss, but it depends on us whether we let this diversity to lead us to the clash of cultures and religions or use it for their fruitful co-existence and inter-religious and inter-cultural harmony. In this brief chapter, we shall try to explain the nature and scope of pluralism and also see how the Guru Granth Sahib takes cognizance of the fact of religious and cultural plurality in and around our society and also probe into the ways the scripture offers to meet the challenge of this diversity.

Unfortunately however, in today's pluralistic global society, each faith-community is not in harmonious relationship with the other. This has been due mainly to the fact that each faith-community is over-zealous in under-rating the ideology and culture of the other *vis-à-vis* its own. Leaders of each religion claim for their faith monopoly over truth. To them, only their religion, only their prophet can lead man on the path to God-realization and self-realization. Other religions are declared just fake and other faith-communities pagans. This exclusivist attitude is doing much damage to our social fabric, and this needs to be rectified. The pluralistic understanding of religion seems the only way-out to make different faith-communities live harmoniously and peacefully.

The pluralistic view of religion implies equal validity to all faiths. All religions share something common : they make

common reference to a single, transcendent reality : though this is a general statement and a caveat to this claim must be entered in the case of certain traditions (e.g. the *sramanic* Indian traditions) which tend to deny the existence of positive reality denoted by words for the Lord-God. Still different religions have genuine differences, for each religion is a different historical manifestation of that reality and it presents visions of God, world and humanity from a localized, historically particular perspective. In other words, it can be said that the essence of the Divine revelation is universal but when shared by the receiver-prophet with mankind in a mundane language in a specific historico-religio-cultural context, it acquires limitations as well as the apparent differentiations.

Accepting the fact of diverse religions being finite manifestations of one Infinite in no way diminishes the significance of any particular religion, rather this fact reveals the richness of the eternal and infinite truth. One must try to understand and appreciate the religious beliefs and practices of one's neighbour. No doubt, one cannot put his faith in parenthesis while trying to understand and examine the faith of the other, yet one must listen attentively to the faith of the other as this is unfolded by the believer himself, without pre-judging that faith and without abandoning one's own commitment. This is a very delicate task as says W.A.C. Warren, "our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on other men's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival."

Religious pluralism cannot be confined just to the knowledge of other religious systems and their doctrines and teachings. This would just mean confronting a religious truth in the abstract. On the other hand, pluralism includes in the

area of its study a knowledge of the persons belonging to other religions, their beliefs and practices. Various factors have been responsible to transform this wide, big world into a global village – physically at least. But, unfortunately, we still prefer to live in our own small religious worlds. We have become neighbours with people of different races and religions, but we do not accept this fact, and still prefer to call and consider them aliens.

Man can lead a meaningful and fuller life only if he works out a more dialogical relationship with his neighbours who may not necessarily be of his own race or colour or his own religious persuasion. There can be no other way out for developing a peaceful and harmonious relationship with them. Dialogue is the only way to reach the truth and thus be in harmony with others, says the scripture. We must realize that people of one faith-community are not on average noticeably either better or worse human beings than those of others. We must accept them in their otherness, appreciate their beliefs and practices and recognize that they have their own rich spiritual experiences.

India encountered religious pluralism as a social reality in the ancient past, but it became a social reality in the West only in the 19th and the 20th centuries. With the realization of this social fact, the earlier view of Christian missionaries has for several reasons undergone a sea change, leading to the reinterpretation and restating of their theology. This awareness came during what is called the European Enlightenment when there developed a realization that Christianity was part of a much larger human world. Changing patterns of mobility also shattered the old conceptions of religious history of mankind. Explosion of information in the west about the religions of the world during the past century or so also helped change the earlier ill-informed and hostile stereotypes of other faiths. Also, the earlier attitude had begun to poison relationship between

Christian minority and other majority communities in some countries of the world. This does not mean that all Christian theologians today tend to be pluralists : there are still some who stick to the earlier exclusivist attitude whereas some others can well be called inclusivists. However, the trend towards pluralism is obvious.

The early Muslim theological stand was that other religions are deviations of the one primordial religion, and Islam was the full and final revelation and therefore the norm of all religions." This attitude was easier to justify so long as Islam remained confined only to a few Arabic states having Muslim majority. However, the changing times have helped Muslims to spread all over the world, and this has resulted in Muslims finding themselves in a minority in alien cultures. At such places in modern-day setup, it has not been that easy to hold on to this view.

Hinduism in Indian context enjoys a unique position insofar as it is an amalgam of various different and sometimes mutually contradictory thought-systems. The different Vedic or Vedantic schools at certain points stand in stark opposition to each other. This has been the result of the Hindu desire and attempt to assimilate unto itself any new religion or sect that grew up in India. The problem of one and many, or of *ekantvad* and *anekantvad* to put in Indian philosophical terminology, is not only the oldest philosophical debate in India but is also suggestive of the typical Hindu attitude towards other faith traditions. *Anekantvad*, an attempt at finding justification in the substantiality of each and every identity (*monad*), has been the view represented by Jainism, an important faith from the pre-Vedic Indian *sramanic* tradition. On the other hand, the *ekantvad*, a Vedantic school, had an acute fear and contempt towards multiplicity and ended in announcing the illusion of reality. The ultimate dominance of the *ekantvad* school showed

the intolerant and absorbing nature of Hinduism vis-à-vis other faiths and faith-communities.

History of India stands witness to the fact that Hinduism has always endeavoured to assimilate religions of Indian origin unto itself, without conceding an independent status to any of them. This has been equally true in ancient as well as modern context. The *sramanic* tradition which has been in existence ever since the pre-Vedic days bore the brunt of Hindu exclusivism when persecution was let loose on their people. History records that a king by the name of Pushyamitra collected the heads of Buddhist, a religion belonging to the *sramanic* tradition, monks executed under his order. However, in the post-Buddhistic era there can be seen a perceptible trend at Hindu absorption of these smaller traditions. One can see a deliberate attempt at forging unifying ties between these traditions by connecting their respective deities into relationships. The aim obvious has been to create amongst them a spirit of accommodation and tolerance. Thus, Hinduism is accommodating and tolerant only insofar as the other tradition, with however different and contradictory a metaphysical doctrine, agrees to be a part of it. In the recent past, we can see the same Hindu attitude towards Sikhism : the hardcore Hindu has repeatedly been saying that Sikhism is part of Hinduism even though everybody else agrees that Sikhism is a distinct and independent faith, and that it differs from Hinduism a lot – metaphysically and otherwise.

Man has to give up that exclusivist attitude and instead realize that there can be no one way to the realization of God, rather there can be many ways and many Saviours to help him on this path. And, these many ways cannot exist in isolation of one another, nor can they possibly remain intolerant of or indifferent towards one another. The neighbour can no longer remain a stranger. It is necessary for different religions and

faith-communities to meet each other and relate to each other, the objective being not to absorb or obliterate the other but to accept the other in his otherness, to help and learn from each other. This has become obligatory for man today because pluralism is no more just a text-book issue but has become an important human existential problem.

The Sikh faith is the youngest of major world religions, and being youngest it can also be called the latest stage in the evolution of the religious consciousness of mankind. It originated with Guru Nanak (1469-1539) in a north-west province of India but has since spread throughout the world despite the fact that it is not a missionary faith. No doubt, the Sikh expansion is mainly because of the Sikh Diaspora, but dissemination of knowledge about the faith has also helped in this expansion, though in a limited way. Chronologically, the fifteenth century when Sikh faith originated belongs to medieval period in Indian history. However, an in-depth study of the faith, its beliefs and practices reveals its critical attitude towards the medieval spirit and its responsiveness to modernity.

Sikh religion can in the present circumstances play a very crucial and constructive role. It, no doubt, accepts plurality of faiths but this acceptance is not passive, rather it is critical. This critical spirit is quite explicit on at least two very vital points. One, the Sikh Gurus are highly critical of any religion and tradition which sanction and safeguard hierarchical division in our social structure. The idea of inequality by birth among the people is not acceptable to them. There are many hymns in the Sikh scripture which criticize the spirit and philosophy of the Vedic tradition which classifies humans into different *varnas* or castes. In Sikh theology, all humans are equal notwithstanding all the differences in their exterior: all humans are, in essence, one with God and equal among themselves as well as in His eye. It rejects the ideas of inherent

inequality among humans and ineligibility of the so-called lower-caste people to achieve the spiritual objective.

Two, the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh tradition condemn the religion that mobilizes mass support in the name of religion to actually serve the interests of the contemporary ruling political class. Sikhism is against religion becoming an instrument of political dominance in the hands of the select few. Therefore, they criticize any religion that serves an oppressive purpose, especially in the hands of political classes. The criticism of the Hindu (brahmins) and Muslim (*qadis*) priestly classes in the scripture should also be read from this perspective. Thus, religion no more remains an asylum for the voiceless and the hapless only, rather it is made a weapon in the hands of the oppressed class against the unjust oppressor.

The Sikh faith integrates the world and worldly life with the idea of divinity. It rejects asceticism, but at the same time it is also equally critical of the hedonistic way of life. Asceticism and hedonism as two extremes are rejected in Sikhism, and the Sikh concept of social action is marked by boundaries of morality. In Sikhism, Khalsa as created by Guru Gobind Singh in fulfilment of Guru Nanak's mission is the agency to which the task of social transformation has been endowed whereas the scripture renders the general framework of structure in which this task is to be accomplished. In other words, the scripture is a sort of constitution which lays down the general framework according to which one must live his social and religious existence and the Khalsa Panth must not only live that kind of life but also create conditions congenial for this sort of life. However, both the structure and the agency must function in harmony to bring about peace and co-existence, love and compassion, equality and justice in society. The Sikh religion articulates a doctrine of God who creates this entire phenomenal world as well as permeates through His creation. This idea of

God being Creator as well as immanent lends relative reality to the creation : this world no more remains sinful or *mayic* or a place for suffering, but becomes a dwelling-place of the Divine. And, a place where resides the Lord God need not be renounced, rather endeavours need be made to turn it into the Kingdom of God. In the process, the Spiritual in Sikhism gets socialized and the secular and social get spiritualized. This entails stress on ethical thematics and an active but righteous participation in familial and social life.

The Sikh definition of the ideal religion also includes performing of good, noble deeds while living this worldly existence along side the remembrance of Divine Name : understandably, religion according to Sikhism must concern itself with both the spiritual and the secular aspects of human life. The lives of the Sikh spiritual preceptors, the message of the Sikh scripture, and the Sikh tradition and history stand witness to the constructive and positive Sikh response to interfaith relations. For example, if we look at the life of the founder of the faith, we learn that after he received the revelation, he remained in a trance for several days and did not return home. It is said that he was summoned by Nirankar, the formless God, who offered him a cup of nectar and directed him to go into the world and spread his message. The first words that he uttered as he came out of his trance were : there is no Hindu and no Muslim. This implied that the external denominations of Hindu and Muslim are of no significance and all humans, of whatever religious denomination, are in essence one.

Thereafter Guru Nanak took out four preaching odysseys in different directions and to different places throughout the country and even outside. Since the object before him was to share the divine message with the people at large, he made it a point to visit as many holy places of whichever tradition as

he could during these travels. These preaching odysseys took him, in the south, up to Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and even up to what we today call Sri Lanka; in the east, he went up to Bihar, Orissa, Assam and even Dhaka which is now the capital town of Bangla Desh; in the west, he passed through Rajasthan, Gujarat and went up to Baghdad (Iraq) and Mecca (Saudi Arabia); and in the north, he went deep into the Himalayas.

During these odysseys, he seems to have made it a point to visit any place of pilgrimage or otherwise important to both Hindus and Muslims. At such places, he would call on the holy men who might be putting up there and have a spiritual discourse with them. At such places, he could also find ready audience to share his message with them. Instead of thrusting his view of truth on anyone, he would listen to them and also share with them the revelation he had had. The Sikh tradition does not support polemic but instead recommends a meaningful and constructive dialogue in which one must listen to the other's viewpoint and then make out his own argument. Such a dialogical relationship with other faiths and faith-communities can help us understand and appreciate them in a better way.

The Sikh scripture stands for respect for all religions, tolerance for religious pluralism, and understanding and co-operation among different faith-communities. It is quite explicit in its statement that revelation cannot be religion-specific, region-specific or caste-specific and that the claim to truth cannot be a monopoly of any one particular religion, caste, class or region. Since each expression of revelation is an attempt at looking at and understanding the Real One in a particular localized context, we must respect other religions notwithstanding our disagreements and differentiations in regard to outward symbols and rituals. That is why the Sikh Gurus advised everybody to be true to his faith : a Muslim

should be a true Muslim and a Hindu should become a true Hindu. There is no instance in Sikh history or tradition of exhorting anybody to get converted into Sikhism because it was, so to say, a better faith than any other. Also, Sikhism endeavours to unite people belonging to different religious traditions into one whole : Sikh theology holds that the object of religion is not to divide mankind, rather to unite it; not to act like scissor and tear asunder the social fabric, rather act like needle and sew it together, says Bhai Gurdas in his *Varan*.

The Sikh scripture, as we said earlier, comprises hymns of several holy men coming from Hindu and Muslim traditions apart of course of six of the Sikh Gurus. The scriptural Word which is divine in nature is taken as the spirit-incarnate of the Gurus. This concept is contrary to the Christian view of Word : there the latter becomes incarnate in Jesus who thus becomes the centre of focus for Christians. In Sikhism, the Gurus incarnate themselves, qua Spirit, in Word, and thus Word becomes the centre of focus for the Sikhs. As it is, all the hymns contained in the scripture are of equal significance and reverence for a Sikh. For example, a hymn of say Kabir, Ravidas or Farid is as sacred to a Sikh as that of say Guru Nanak. Thus, the holy Granth Sahib provides a unique example of negating the idea of revelation being religion-specific and of showing respect for religious pluralism, bringing together the essential message of religion as communicated by holy men from different traditions.

The inclusion in the Sikh scripture of a fairly substantial number of compositions by certain God-inspired poets belonging to an era spread over five centuries is a fact important enough to note. The hymns rendered by these holy men in their language and idiom are so integrated as to find complete correspondence with the theme or motifs in the compositions of the Gurus. Obviously, the idea in the mind of Guru Arjan

was to establish the fundamental unity of all religions and mystic experiences. It will be absolutely wrong to call it an attempt at syncretizing, rather it is an integral congress of minds and souls, operating on the same spiritual plane. The elevation of these verses by Bhagats, Sufis and Bhatts to the status of the logos was to salute the power of the Word in whatever form revealing the glory of God. No doubt, the Guru Granth Sahib is today the scripture of the Sikh faith, but its contents and message give it a much wider representational status : it goes beyond sectarian considerations and transforms it into the heritage of entire mankind.

The contributors (other than the Gurus) to the scripture, come not only from different regional backgrounds but also from different caste groups, and thus they represent the wisdom of the length and breadth of the entire Indian sub-continent. For example, Jaidev belonged to Bengal, Shaikh Farid to Multan (West Punjab, Pakistan), Trilochan and Namdev came from Maharashtra, Kabir and Ravidas from Kanshi/Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh). They also belong to different caste-groups – some of them are the ‘twice-born’ Brahmins, others the ‘proud’ Khatri (Kshatri), some others the ‘lowly’ and ‘outcaste’ sudras, and some the ‘unlettered’ Jats (Vaishya). This was at a time when the caste system in India had almost paralyzed the conscience of man. Kabir is a weaver, Ravidas is a cobbler, Namdev a calico-printer, and Dhanna a peasant whereas all the Gurus are Khatri by caste.

Thus, the Sikh scripture rejects both the medieval Islamic view that the Quran was the full and final revelation and the Brahmanic view that barred this lower strata of society from religious enlightenment. Reference to the caste here only denotes the caste in which they were born, otherwise the scripture rejects the idea of caste and instead declares that it is not the caste or a family one is born in but one's deeds done

in this world which determine one's status in society. It rejects caste system in human social relations and declares open all social and religious offices to everybody who otherwise deserves them. The Sikh shrines are open to all irrespective of their caste, class or creed. The foundation stone of the Harimandar at Amritsar was got laid down by Guru Arjan by the hands of Mian Mir, the famous Sufi saint of the day. All the devotees in a *gurdwara* sit together on the same floor and any true Sikh can read the scripture and say the *ardas*. It is not one's caste or creed but the good deeds done during his lifetime that earn for him a place in the Divine Court. The Khalsa Panth in which the Sikh movement culminates is a casteless and classless social ideal of Sikhism.

Similarly, Sikhism also rejects the idea of there being only one Saviour : the idea that my prophet or spiritual preceptor is the only Saviour to take man on the road to salvation is alien to Sikhism which takes different religions as divine revelations made known by the prophets or spiritual preceptors at different times in different spatio-cultural contexts. It accepts each one of the prophets and the traditions founded by them as equally valid to take man on the path to God-realization. In one of his hymns as included in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, Guru Amar Das, the third spiritual preceptor of the Sikhs, declares all religious traditions equally valid as he prays to Lord saying :

The world is burning in the fire of passion,
Save it, O Lord, by Thy grace;
Save it the way Thou consider best.

There are several instances in the Sikh tradition where we find the Sikh Gurus advising their followers to give equal regard to the prophets and seers from all traditions. They must also not look down upon those who have a different form of worship. Such an attitude in the late medieval times was much ahead of the times and can very easily be taken as a precursor

to the pluralistic school among modern theologians. The most oft-quoted example in this behalf is that of Guru Arjan who was once visited by Bhai Gopi (a Bhardwaj Brahmin) and his companions Bhai Vesa and Bhai Tulsia (also Bhardwaj Brahmins) and Bhai Bhiara. They were, as says Bhai Mani Singh in *Sikhan di Bhagat Mala* and Bhai Gurdas in his *Varan*, confused by the diverse incarnations in which God was worshipped. The Guru advised them, "All forms and attributes are God's, yet He transcends them. You should, therefore, worship only the Absolute One. At the same time, you must abjure all rancour towards everybody who has a different way of worship."

Lest this understanding and appreciation of other religions should remain an abstract idea, Sikhism favours a dialogical relationship between different faith-communities. The Sikh scripture is quite emphatic in stating that man throughout his worldly existence should continue to maintain dialogue because that is the only way at reaching the truth. Guru Nanak in one of his hymns says – *jab lag dunia rahiai Nanak kichhu suniai kichhu kahiai*. Let it also be clarified that the idea of *kichhu suniai* and *kichhu kahiai* implies fruitful dialogue aimed at searching the truth. The Sikh scripture categorically rejects polemic, rather it says that it is only after polemic is put to an end that the real research for truth begins and gets accomplished – *khoji upjai badi binasai hau bali bali gur kartara*. Whereas polemic causes – and is also caused by – ego which in the Sikh scripture is referred to as a "serious malady," humility which is a necessary prerequisite to listen to the other's viewpoint is the essence of all virtues. There are innumerable references stressing the value of humility. Kabir in humility calls himself the worst and everybody else as good, and goes on to say that he who believes in this dictum is his friend. Shaikh Farid recommends man to be as humble as grass

on the pathway which gets trodden under the feet of many. Guru Nanak calls himself lowliest among the lowly, and Guru Arjan holds that he who considers himself humble be taken as the highest. Thus, the message of the scripture is to cultivate the value of humility and listen to the viewpoint of the others and share one's own views so that one can reach the truth.

The best example of interfaith dialogue as contained in the Sikh scripture is Guru Nanak's *Sidh Gosti* which is a sort of spiritual dialogue on the Sikh philosophy of life vis-à-vis the philosophy of yoga. In this composition, the yogis put searching questions to Guru Nanak who answers them with courtesy and confidence. The dialogue is held without hurting the feelings of any of the participants, ever retaining serenity and sobriety and aiming at realizing the truth. This is the basis as well as the ideal of interfaith dialogue in Sikhism. Apart from this composition, we also find dialogic elements in some hymns of the saints. There are certain *slokas* of saints, especially of Kabir and Farid which have been commented upon by the Gurus. The objective apparently is to clarify or supplement the message through dialogic means rather than creating any polemic.

The message of religious tolerance and acceptance of religious pluralism as contained in the Gurus' utterances included in the scripture is lived in the lives of the Gurus and in the Sikh tradition in general. This gets confirmed by the fact that Guru Nanak was held in equal reverence both by the Hindus and Muslims, apart from Sikhs. The fact of Guru Arjan gathering both Hindus and Muslims around him is acknowledged by Emperor Jahangir himself in his *Tuzk*. Guru Tegh Bahadur gave away his life so as to protect the religious freedom of man. Obviously, he offered himself for sacrifice to stop the forcible conversion of Hindus by the fanatic Muslim ruler of the day. However, his sacrifice is for the religious freedom of man and he would have laid down his life for the

protection of religious symbols of Muslims had the situation so demanded. In Guru Gobind Singh's fight against the deceit and decadence of Hindu Rajput chiefs and the Mughal oppression, there were many Hindus and Muslims on his side. Among the Sikhs, Bhai Kanahaiya is the best example of a Sikh seeing the same divine essence behind the varied religious denominations of wounded soldiers in the battle-field of Anandpur. Treating all human beings as spiritually one and ethnically equal notwithstanding their different religious denominations is the pre-requisite for maintaining harmonious relationship between different faith-communities.

The modern-day world suffers from the problems of mutual distrust and disharmony, oppression and violence, and if we have to set the world free from these and such other evils, we must see others as our brothers and sisters, we need to discover how to affirm our own identity without threatening the identity of others. We must realize that if and when we revile another's religion or desecrate another community's place of worship, we revile or desecrate the Divine Presence itself. This happens to be the central message of the Sikh faith, which says that the idea of God's love for all teaches us to accept and value the other in his or her otherness. It considers all religions and their revelations valid, appreciates others' faiths but at the same time adopts dialogue to convey its differences on whatever points, makes love for God the *vis-a-tergo* of love for mankind and express this love through *sewa* and such other philanthropic activities. The Sikh stress is on ethics of creative activism aiming at the realization of an ideal social structure of the Gurus' vision – a structure wherein love and equality prevail, the otherness of the other and human dignity are respected, and oppression is replaced by justice mingled with compassion. But the need of the hour is that we must not limit ourselves to words alone, rather we must try and put them into practice and live the idea in our practical social life.

Chapter VII

PEACE AND COMMUNAL HARMONY

History of mankind stands witness that religion has in certain ages acted or, more precisely, has been used by the ecclesiastical authorities, social institutions and political powers in different parts of the world for the exploitation and persecution of people. In the process, the basic human rights had been violated and fundamental freedom of man denied. Religious majorities have ever endeavoured to subdue or assimilate unto themselves the religious minorities in the name of homogenization. Consequently, this causes a sense of alienation among the latter and unwanted bitterness and discord among societal relations in general.

The last few decades of the twentieth century stand witness to the growth of religious resurgence as well as upsurge in religious fundamentalism almost throughout the world. Interestingly, both the phenomena have been almost contemporaneous, but otherwise there is no ideologically commonality between the two of them. As it is, the former phenomenon has occurred only in the relatively well developed and economically rich nations whereas the latter had grown generally in the countries with poorer and backward economies. The former is a positive phenomenon which revives man's faith in religion and religious values which can be used to overpower the discord and violence being raised in the name of religion. But the latter maintains, in opposition to modernism, traditional orthodox beliefs such as the inerrancy of scripture

and literal acceptance of the creeds as fundamentals. Hence, this makes religion a tool in the hands of clergy for fermenting trouble in human social relations.

There can be several reasons for this recent religious resurgence. For example, a newly revived interest in the study of religion and religious values and a reaction against excessive emphasis on Western style of secularism could be among the more important reasons. The movements like liberation theology which began in the Latin American church in the 1970s and the movements for inter-religious dialogue and religious pluralism that followed soon after have tried to provide a social praxis to religion. If religion can help us better our life in this mundane world and resolve some of our existential problems, it is sure relevant and important for man. This social praxis provided a new interest in the study of religion. The Western style of secularism is one of the several political and other ideologies which met with failure and ultimate doom during the twentieth century. Some of the people and nations earlier given to this kind of ideology reacted sharply and preferred religious orthodoxy (the other extreme) as their political creed.

Religious resurgence is a positive development and must not be confused or identified with the evil of religious fundamentalism : there are vital differences between the two. To treat over-simplistically these two different phenomena as one and the same is sure to lead to problems some of which we already confront today : for example, the French government's decision against the wearing of any visible religious symbol (it happens to be turban in the case of the Sikhs) is a case in point. Turban-wearing is an integral part of the Sikh way of life. Though the Sikh youth abroad tended to be going away from their faith and thus preferred to go without hair or turban yet its new interest in Sikh symbols including the turban is not

indicative of orthodoxy, but of its newly developed interest in the faith of its forefathers. It is a very dangerous trend to try to check and eliminate religious resurgence (alongwith or in the name of religious fundamentalism) with a view to eliminating conflict and violence in society. The need is to understand that only a renewed appreciation for religion can help us find cure for conflicts and violence being raised in society in the name of religion.

As it happens, some nations and communities have taken the rise of both the phenomena of religious resurgence and religious fundamentalism as a challenge, a threat to be met with. The challenge is taken up by the self-righteous 'superpower nations' at the international level and by the equally self-righteous 'majority communities' at the local community level: it is not done to check any malady (of religious resurgence or religious orthodoxy) or for the welfare of the masses. In fact, the violence caused as a result of presenting such a challenge cannot be called religious in nature: this violence is actually caused, though in the name of religion, by either the 'superpower nations' or the 'majority communities' to serve their sectarian interests. The former does so under the camouflage of saving the world by, say for instance, destroying the weapons of mass destruction though the argument on its face value seems ridiculous – possession of the weapons of mass destruction by a non-Western or non-Christian country is dangerous for mankind whereas the same is perfectly safe in the hands of a Western Christian country. The latter, majority communities, attempt to homogenize the society by assimilating different minority ethnic and religious groups unto themselves.

In the Indian context, we have seen many a time violence being perpetrated – and then justified – on the minority groups in the name of religious/cultural homogenization which the

minorities take, and rightly so, as threat to their self-defined identity. It is a part of modern Indian history that the protagonists of Hindutva have been continuously and consistently insisting on transforming the pluralist Indian society into a Hindu society under the camouflage of the homogenization by saying that the Sikhs are Hindus (though the entire world has accepted Sikhism as a distinct and separate religion) and that the Muslims are aliens. The past Indian experience also shows that this kind of majoritarian attitude has only caused a feeling of alienation and distrust among the minority communities. And this distrust and conflict in inter-religious relations often gets manifested in various forms of social discord and violence. We have suffered through the violent days of Partition of the country in 1947 when more than a million people were killed, many more made homeless and innumerable molested and injured. Then again, in 1984 was witness to the anti-Sikh pogrom, the worst kind of violence having taken place in the capital town of the largest democracy of the world, India. The Gujarat riots and the Hindutva stand are things of the recent past.

Another way of misusing religion to oppress and humiliate a part of mankind has been through evangelism or proselytization. This implies an undeclared statement that the other religion is inferior to your own because that could be the only reason for converting one from the other faith to your own. In modern-day era, this has been one of the foremost reasons for embittering individual and inter-community relations. As Christianity entered the undeveloped Asian/Indian continent more than a century back, its attitude as manifested in the behaviour of its missionaries was typically exclusivist. They termed other religions as invalid and other faith-communities as pagans. Similarly, the Islamic attitude towards other faiths had also been exclusivist in the main : to

the Muslims, those who do not follow the path of Islam are *kafirs* or non-believers. They made blatant use of force for the spread of Islam and for securing conversions from other communities. This attitude of Christians and Muslims went almost unchallenged until they behaved so in countries where they either enjoyed majority or held political power. This kind of exclusivist attitude cannot go on in modern-day world and that is perhaps why a change in their attitude from exclusivism to inclusivism to pluralism is perceptible.

However, recent spurt in the publication of literature on all world religions (including their history, philosophy and theology) has greatly transformed the human understanding of religion. It has made modern man believe that all religions of the world are equally genuine and valid. The revolution in the means of transport and communication has also turned this wide big world into a small global village. The resultant migration of people belonging to different faith-communities to countries all over has also changed the population complexion everywhere. No religious community can now claim to ever remain in majority in all the cities/towns of a country. As a result of this, we find that even Christians and Muslims have begun to discard their earlier exclusivist attitude. If the Muslims have begun to say that they are not theologically exclusivists, the Christian missionaries have mostly turned inclusivists and the credit for raising voice in favour of religious pluralism also goes to certain Christian theologians and scholars. Unfortunately, the Sikh scholars have somehow failed so far to share at the international forum their scriptural attitude of acceptance and appreciation of other faiths and faith-communities.

The practice of conversion has not entirely stopped, but we have seen protests, violent as well as non-violent, being made by the community from which conversions take place. India has been witness to several situations where missionaries

had to face the wrath, justifiably or unjustifiably, of certain native fundamentalists. To save mankind from this uncalled for violence, there is an urgent need for change in this attitude. This has been necessary to stress that the practice of evangelism or conversion is no more valid these days. The choice of religion should be left to each individual, and he should be free to choose and follow the religion of his choice, without any kind of moral or material pressure from any quarters whatsoever.

Evangelism can also manifest in several other incarnations – ideological, political, economic and so on. There have been examples of forcing one's ideology on the other, both at the individual and national levels. The world has been through the cold war between the rightist (capitalist) and the leftist (communist and socialist) countries. Even today some of the developed and rich countries are trying to force their ideologies, economic as well as political, on under-developed and poorer nations camouflaged as globalization. When the protagonists of Hindutva in India ask the Sikhs to assimilate within Hinduism and the Muslims to get out of the country to make way of homogeneity, it is another way of evangelism without earning for itself the title of exclusivists.

Religion has, as we have seen in the brief discussion in the preceding pages, been misused to cause stress and strife, discord and disharmony in human relations at the individual, social, national and international levels. However, at the same time we cannot deny the fact that religion has also acted as a powerful force in bringing about the moral and spiritual regeneration and elevation of human society. It has also helped in effecting unity, solidarity and integration among the peoples of different races and cultures. Love for mankind, equality and justice in human social affairs, compassion for the weak and the helpless and selfless service of mankind through altruistic activities are some of the values common to each religion. Thus,

if religion is followed in its true spirit, it will help us overcome hatred and violence, disharmony and discords in the world.

However, as it is, we find religion playing a dialectical role. We come across in society many discords being raised in the name of religion and cases of inciting men of one religious denomination to act violently against those of the other. However, such discords and violent conflicts were never the creation of religion, but more often than not they have been laid at religion's door. Thus, religion is for peace and harmony, but is used by some self-centred elements for their own gain by misrepresenting to people what religion is and what it stands for. The common man in his ignorance becomes in the hands of such vested interests a tool for causing violence as well as becoming the victim of the hatred and violence caused in its wake.

It becomes thus pertinent for us to first try and remove the misconceptions about what really constitutes religion. It is wrong to assume religion as merely a divine experience without referring to its social correlates. No doubt, religion is pre-eminently a spiritual and psychic experience correlating the essence of human life to a mystical entity recognized as God, but this is not the whole truth. Nor is religion simply a social phenomenon dwelling only on promoting the virtues of social service, neighbourliness, and humanitarian or social ethics. Both these exclusivist views do not justify the definition of religion. True religion besides its stress on metaphysical and psychical aspects should generate socially relevant behavioural persuasions in the faithfuls. Religious praxis does not remain circumscribed to prayers and worship of a deity in personal solitude but is intimately related to the practical social life of man. By virtue of its twin-dimensions one relating to human consciousness and the other to social practice, religion has been influencing human society in different ways ever since the dawn of civilization.

Sikhism, the youngest of the world religions, takes in man as a whole, and seeks in his improvement the advancement of society. The Sikh approach to life is two-fold and it tries to keep close to each other the parallel streams of man's esoteric and exoteric life. It does not consider this world a mere *maya*, something to be shunned by whosoever wants to attain the spiritual object of life. On the other hand, this world is said to be the abode of the True Lord - *ihu jagu sache ki hai kothari sache ka vichi vasu*, says the Sikh scripture. And, a social reality wherein Lord-God is immanent cannot be termed false or *mayic*. The mundane reality gets spiritualized by the divine immanence therein. And, if God is Himself present in the world we live, leaving it would virtually mean going away from God. Thus, the idea of renunciation of the world for the realization of spiritual ideal is completely and thoroughly rejected.

The Sikh scripture rejects the ascetic life in favour of a householder's life a pre-requisite for God-realization. An ascetic endeavours for his individual liberation, with no concern for the fate of fellow human beings. Thus, asceticism may have been of benefit to the select few, but it ignored the social concerns and society at large. Nobody bothered for the degeneration towards which the society was being led to. Bhai Gurdas, the known Sikh exegete and scholar, also touches upon the issue. According to him, if the enlightened people like *sidhas* renounced the world and took shelter in the hills and forests, who would take care of the degenerating society ? In other words, presence of such enlightened persons is necessary in the world so that the values they cherish must become applicable in our social secular life. Also, since the religious and spiritual life of man is embedded in society, the need to raise his moral and ethical standards is inherent in it : without this, the attainment of spiritual goal is not possible. Thus, the Sikh stress on householder's life stands for the Sikh emphasis on the transformation of this world into

sach khand or the Kingdom of God. In such a social set up communal harmony and peace will prevail.

The call which heralded the Sikh ministry symbolized the integrative intuition of the founder of the faith : "There is no Hindu and there is no Muslim." In a world beset with strife and disharmony, Guru Nanak spoke of a single humanity. What he actually meant was that religious denominations were not significant : what is of ultimate importance is the essence of man which is divine in nature. In other words, all human beings are one and the same, notwithstanding their different religious denominations. The scripture says in this behalf :

Allah (God) pervades each body :

Think of this in your mind;

The same Real One pervades both Hindus and Muslims;

Proclaims Kabir loudly.

This vision of a common integrated humanity was very significant, a vision that transcended all barriers of caste, creed, colour or community. The scriptural hymns point towards unity and equality of mankind, towards bringing about a spirit of tolerance and co-existence. Even Bhai Gurdas, in his *Varan*, talks of the role of religion in human social relations : he says that the role to be played by the Sikh faith is not that of a scissor that tears apart the fabric but is that of the needle which sews together the fabric of religious life torn asunder by various prevailing traditions :

Tying the threads, weaver weaves a single yarn
a huge warp and weft.

Tailor tears it apart and spoils it,
torn cloth cannot be sold.

His scissor cuts the cloth, but
the needle stitches it together again.

Lord is one, but
different Hindu and Muslim ways have been created.

The path of Sikhism is pre-eminent,
as it accepts close relation of Guru and Sikh.
The double-minded are ever perplexed,
and they suffer thus.

Guru Nanak's idea of unity of mankind did not seek to bring about a syncretistic union between different religious denominations and traditions, but he aimed at bringing together the different and in some ways contradictory culture-forms into a common fold of one spiritual and social brotherhood. He wanted mankind to form a single human community with a true spirit of fraternity and fellowship, of fearlessness and rancourlessness, with that deep moral and ethical commitment which expresses itself in concern for fellow human beings. Rejecting the prevalent Indian belief in mankind's emanation from the different organs of the body of Brahman, Guru Nanak proclaimed all mankind one, in spirit, with God – *panch tatu mili kaia kini tis mahi ram ratan lai chini*, says the scripture. This means that the human body made of five perishable elements contains within soul which is divine in nature. Each human being having the same divine spark within implies that none is superior or inferior to the other. Kabir, in one of his hymns, also reiterates this idea when he says :

First, Lord created light and then
through his omnipotence created all men;
from one Light emanates all world –
who then is good and who bad ?
Kabir goes on to warn man against
his going astray, and makes him believe that
Creator is in creation and creation in Creator :
He prevades all places.

He believes that this divine immanence is beyond all religious denominations as he says that the same Lord pervades in both the Hindus and the Muslims – *hindu turk duhun mahi ekai*. In other words, God manifests Himself in all beings and at all places, thus

lending (relative) reality to all His creation. However, man though made in the image of God possesses this image only potentially and not actually. The Sikh doctrine of divine unity and ethnic equality implies the universal Fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of mankind. Such a sense of equality is a must to bring about peace and harmony in society.

Sikhism lays great emphasis on the spiritual unity and ethnic equality of man. All differences between man and man on the basis of caste, colour or creed are only man-made, without any divine sanction behind them. He pervades all those born of eggs, fetus, or by any other means – *andaj jeraj utbhuj setaj tere kite janta; ek purab mai tera dekhia tu sabhna mahi ravanta*. But still we have seen conflicts in human social situations on the basis of caste and class differentiations. In the Indian context, people belonging to the so-called low castes had suffered untold atrocities and oppression. The plight of the so-called outcastes was even more pitiable. Even the shadow of an outcaste falling on a Brahmin was believed to have made him impure. Any physical touch with them and thus any social interaction except an order issued or an abuse given from afar was unthought of.

In the India of pre-Sikhism days, these low-caste and outcaste people were considered ineligible for salvation. They could neither enter any place of worship nor could they listen to any religious discourse. Hard punishments were the order of the day if any of them dared violate these taboos. There are examples of lead being put into their ears so that in future they dared not listen to the recitation of revelatory hymns or other religious discourse. In such a social set-up only hatred and distrust, discord and disharmony brewed. In fact, no social set-up wherein a significant number of its populace is treated as sub-human can boast of developing harmonious and peaceful atmosphere. The Sikh Gurus refused to accept this man-made

division of mankind. To them, what makes man great is not the family or caste or creed in which he is born, but the deeds he does during his present life. The Sikh scripture rejects the idea of any inherent inequality between man and man, and rather declares that the real worth of a man depends not on his caste or creed but on his deeds :

Lords asks not for man's caste and family,
So, man, find thou the Lord's True Home.
Man's caste and status is the same
As the deeds he does.

The Sikh scriptural literature thus serves as a constitution to provide theoretical guidelines for mankind to build on their basis an equitable and egalitarian social order. The creation of the Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh on 30 March 1699 was the establishment, in microscopic form, of such a just, equitable and egalitarian social structure. The event is also taken as the fulfilment of the mission initiated by Guru Nanak. The ceremony for the creation of the Khalsa is of great importance on at least two counts :

One, while addressing the convened assembly on this day, Guru Gobind Singh sought from amongst the audience a person who was willing to offer his head to the Guru. He wanted one who could lay down his life for the Guru's cause to rise up and come to him. A fellow from amongst the audience got up and offered himself to the Guru. Now the Guru repeated this demand for five times and thus selected five persons who were willing to lay down their lives on the Guru's asking. These chosen five are in Sikh tradition known as *Panj Piare* or the five beloved of the Guru. This selection of the *Panj Piare* is significant as it is another step in the development of the Sikh tradition of martyrdom. Interestingly in the Indian languages and tradition of pre-Sikhism days there was no equivalent word for martyrdom or *shahadat* : it is the latter term which Sikhism borrowed from Arabic language via the Muslim tradition.

Shahadat is the high tragedy of supreme sacrifice one makes for one's faith and thus bears witness to its truth and to one's own passionate adherence to it. Implicitly, a martyr or *shahid* is one who by courting martyrdom bears witness to the truth of his faith and to his own unswerving commitment and allegiance to it. Implicit in martyrdom is one's willingness to withstand aggression or persecution, and meet death or, short of that, suffer privation for upholding a righteous and noble cause for perpetuating lasting peace.

The entry of Islam in India is marked by religious intolerance and violence. Beginning with the invasions of Babar (a contemporary of Guru Nanak) and the untold suffering caused in their wake, the Muslim rulers with the sole exception of Akbar followed the policy of religious intolerance and persecution. On the other hand, Sikhism tends to accept the plurality of faiths, acknowledges the validity of all of them, and rejects the claim of monopoly over truth by any particular religion. It states quite unequivocally that revelation is not specific to any religion, region or person or caste. It stands for the freedom of man to practice the faith of his choice. This ideology of the Sikh Gurus was contrary to that of religious intolerance and persecution followed especially by Jahangir and later on by his successor Aurangzeb.

Clearly the pontificate of Guru Arjan (1563-1606) was the time when the Guru had to bear witness to the truth of his faith and to his own unswerving commitment and allegiance to it. Emperor Jahangir, who ruled India at that time had felt alarmed by the growing influence of Guru Arjan as he wrote in his *Tuzk* :

So many of the simple-minded Hindus, nay, many foolish Muslims too had been fascinated by the Guru's ways and teaching. For many years the thought had been presenting itself to my mind that either I should put an end to this false traffic or that he be brought into the fold of Islam.

He goes on to add that –

I fully knew of his heresies, and I ordered that he should be brought into my presence, that his property be confiscated and that he should be put to death with torture.

Guru Arjan stood for the religious freedom of man and refused to renounce his faith. He willingly offered himself to suffer any privation and even meet death for upholding his principles. As a contemporary Christian missionary records, this 'good Pope' "died, overwhelmed by the sufferings, torments, dishonours" heaped on him by a fanatic ruler. Thus, Guru Arjan became the first martyr of the Sikh faith.

When Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675) assumed the spiritual leadership of the Sikh faith in 1664, India was ruled by Emperor Aurangzeb. A pious man in his personal life, Aurangzeb was an orthodox Muslim who had waded through a river of blood to reach the throne : he had to imprison his father and kill his brothers to get the crown. He followed a fanatical religious policy to appease and please the Muslim orthodoxy. He decreed "to destroy with a willing hand the schools and temples of the infidels and put an entire stop to their religious practices and teachings" (1669) and imposed *jazia*, a tax non-Muslim population had to pay for permission to live in an Islamic State (1679). There were many more such edicts which aimed at humiliating the non-Muslims. Though Aurangzeb had nothing personal against Guru Tegh Bahadur, yet both of them stood clearly for ideals in stark opposition to each other. Guru Tegh Bahadur could not bear the persecution of others and he seems to have made up his mind to resist the Emperor's policy of religious persecution and even to lay down his life to redeem the freedom of belief.

The decisive moment came in 1675 when some Kashmiri *pandits* waited upon the Guru at Anandpur. They had come to the Guru to complain against Ifikhar Khan, Aurangzeb's

satrap in Kashmir, who was making *en masse* conversions to Islam through use of force. The Guru listened to their woes and resolved to take upon himself the onus of defending their right to religious practice and belief. He advised them to tell the authority in Delhi that if the Guru was converted, they would all voluntarily accept Islam. Resolved to challenge the royal policy of religious exclusivism and intolerance, the Guru of his own set out for Delhi. Although the Guru was himself leading to Delhi, the authorities arrested him on the way, put him in chains and brought him to Delhi. His refusal to renounce his faith resulted in his public execution in Chandni Chowk on 11 November 1675.

Thus, Guru Tegh Bahadur took up cudgels on behalf of the hapless Hindus on his own; it was more for redeeming freedom of faith for people irrespective of the religious tradition they belonged to. In the Indian history and folklore, he has always been remembered as the protector of the Hindu faith—a unique example of its kind in the history of mankind. Interestingly, there are several Sikh scriptural hymns criticizing *janeu* and *tilak* which the Brahmanical class had begun to consider an end in themselves, thus giving precedence to form over the spirit of religion, but the Guru stood for freedom of belief and practice for everyone. The religious history of mankind provides no second example of a spiritual leader laying down his life for the people belonging to a religious tradition other than his own. Second, the Sikh Gurus had nothing against Islam as such, and the Sikh scripture is quite emphatic in stating that the scriptures of neither the Indian nor Semitic religions can be called false, rather false are those who do not reflect on them. Had the contemporary political situation in India been the other way round, Guru Tegh Bahadur would surely have made the same sacrifice for the sake of the Muslims.

The resolution by the Guru to court martyrdom was

deliberate and conscious, and the authorities intervened only after he took up the challenge to undo both the evil as evil and the suffering of evil as such : the authorities felt his teachings were strengthening among the people the resolve, the determination to suffer hardships and even death rather than give up their faith under coercion. It was a peculiar situation of self-prompted and meaningful suffering for the sake of others but to uphold a cherished ideal. The Guru remained in perfect poise throughout his resolve, and his spiritual state reflecting full faith in God's will can well be imagined from a close reading of the *slokas* he is believed to have composed during the days of his captivity in Delhi. The followers who had accompanied the Guru to Delhi retained their unflinching faith in the Guru and his ideals till they were put to cruel death before the Guru's own eyes. This was like a true martyr who must meet his end in perfect poise. It is not by way of comparison but even the New Testament (John 12) while referring to Jesus' mental state on the eve of his crucifixion says that his heart felt "troubled" and Jesus himself calls it "an hour of suffering."

Guru Gobind Singh, members of his family and numerous of his Sikhs underwent much suffering and privation in their fight against the bigotry of the Mughal government and the orthodox Rajput hill chiefs. Two of his younger sons preferred death to making compromises with the truth of their faith. Their passionate adherence to it even at such a tender age makes their martyrdom all the more significant. A few days before, the elder two sons of the Guru laid down their lives fighting against the Mughal hordes at Chamkaur. Like their father and younger brothers, they preferred death to compromising with bigotry and intolerance. The Sikh history thereafter has a long tradition of martyrdom – Sikhs suffered privation and even met death, but remained committed to the truth of their faith, to the values their Gurus stood for so that

the world is freed from evils like religious intolerance and persecution and instead values like peace and harmony, love and compassion prevail. Thus courting martyrdom is another way of bringing lasting peace and harmony in society.

Sikhism holds that no religion is superior to or better than the other, rather it impresses upon every man of faith to discover for himself the essential meaning of his religion. It considers different religions as different paths leading to the same objective, the Divine portal, thereby declaring all religions equally valid insófar as they help man reach the pinnacles of glory – spiritual as well as social. To Sikhism, all – irrespective of their caste or creed – are its own; none is alien – *sabhe sanjhiwal sadain koi na disai bahara jio*. The Lord God of all, including the Hindus and Muslims, is one and the same – *hindu turk ka sahib ek; kah karai mullah kah karai saikh*. The message of the scripture is common for all – *khatri Brahman sud vais updes chahu varana kau sanjha*. The same idea is reiterated when the Sikh scripture condemns the behaviour of the adherents of both Hinduism and Islam without condemning their scriptures : The implicit meaning here is that the essence of each religion as enshrined in its scripture is of love and peace, but he is critical of the manner in which the adherents have strayed from the truth enshrined in these scriptures. He says :

They call God Ram and Rahim,
His Name is one, and they both have strayed.
They forget the Vedas and the Kateb,
Tempted by worldly avarice, they are demons.
Truth gets discarded in a corner,
The Brahmins and Mullas are in conflict with each other.
Thus transmigration is not annulled.

The Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture, compiled by Guru Arjan, is itself the best example of religious plurality, tolerance and co-existence. The contributors to it include

besides six of the ten Gurus more than thirty saints and mystics coming from both the Hindu and Muslim traditions. Some of them belong to the so-called lower castes. These saints whose compositions preach values identical with those of the Sikh Gurus come from different parts of India. For example, Kabir belonged to Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh); Jaidev to Bengal; Sadhna to Sindh; Namdev, Trilochan and Parmanand to Maharashtra, Farid to Punjab and Pipa to Quetta. All compositions in the Sikh scripture irrespective of their authorship command equal respect among the Sikhs who hold them in equal reverence and do not give precedence to a verse say of Guru Nanak over the verse of say either Kabir or Farid or Ravidas or Dhanna. Thus, the scripture itself is a concrete example of the Sikh tolerance of and love for other religions.

The very fact that Guru Arjan included therein the compositions of all these Hindu and Muslim saints and that Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), the tenth and the last of the person-Gurus in Sikhism, conferred on the scripture the pontifical status for all time to come implies that the Sikh Gurus felt that a synthesis of all religious forces was possible and theirs was perhaps the first attempt in that direction. The Sikh scripture is a unique compilation in this respect.

The Sikh Gurus aimed at establishing a new world of freedom and fearlessness, peace and harmony. For this purpose, they not only gave great spiritual ideals but also put these ideals into practice. The Sikh institutions of *sangat* and *pangat* which began in the time of the Gurus are still an important part of the Sikh ethos and are the living examples of human equality and unity. There is no taboo in Sikhism on remembrance of Divine Name (*nam japna*) in private but it lays special emphasis on congregational or communal worship. All are equal in the congregation and anybody can lead the congregation. Similarly, the institution of *langar* or community kitchen not only

provides food to the needy from any caste or creed but is also aimed at creating a fellow-feeling among those who partake of food there : everybody, however high or low, sits in the *pangat* or row and partakes of the food prepared communally.

Love, peace and goodwill were to be the watch-words of a true religion as defined by Guru Nanak. God in Sikhism is a source of love and grace and is also recognized as the ground of entire existence. In fact, the way to God-realization is said to be through love for mankind – *sach kahu sun lehu sabai jini prem kio tin hi prabh paio*, says Guru Gobind Singh in his *Akal Ustati*. In fact, a person with no love in his heart is as good as dead even though one may be very beautiful, of high family, much educated and so on – *ati sundar kulin chaturmukh giani bhagwant; mirtak kahiai nanaka jih prit nahi bhagwant*.

Among the divine attributes mentioned in the Sikh scripture are rancourlessness (*nirvair*) and fearlessness (*nirbhau*). This is basic to the Sikh thought as well as to the tradition. The ideal state of man, both individually and socially, is described in the Guru Granth Sahib where it is said : May I hold none in fear, nor may I own to be fear of anybody – *bhai kahu ko deti nahi, nahi bhai manat an*, says Guru Tegh Bahadur in one of his hymns as included in the Guru Granth Sahib.

The first part of this statement stands for the cessation of aggression, exploitation and highhandedness as it advises man not to hold anybody in fear, not to dominate or demean the other. This abnegation of aggression, etc., is necessary to bring about peace and harmony in society. Situations may arise when peace becomes definitely immoral as, for example, when human rights come into direct conflict with the desire for peace. Peace and communal harmony will certainly prevail if all men agree to hold none in fear, but the problem arises when a person or a group of persons tries to subjugate others and hold them in fear. In such circumstances, the Sikh advice is

not to own to anybody's fear for the sake of keeping peace. However, the resistance must be non-violent to begin with, but when all other means fail, resort to arms is declared valid and advisable. However, this resistance or fight is never for personal or narrow gains; it is for the sake of righteousness or *dharma*. Peace is of profound significance, but justice in human affairs in an overriding value for which even the peace is not considered too high. Sikh history is full of such examples when they suffered in their peaceful resistance to the unlawful aggression or oppression but took to the sword when all other means failed. Martyrdom of Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur and the creation of the *khalsa* by Guru Gobind Singh have to be read in this light.

For peace and harmony in society, economic and social inequalities must cease. Sikhism lays emphasis on the value and dignity of work as well as on a fair distribution of the rewards of labour. *Kirat karni* (working with one's hands), *vand chhakna* (sharing with others the fruit of one's labour) are two of the three cardinal virtues of a Sikh; the third being *nam japna* (meditating upon the name of God). Contribution of tithe, i.e. one-tenth of one's income, for common cause is mandatory for each Sikh. This helps one to cultivate a feeling of detachment towards material possessions and also remove the sufferings of the needy. There is also an equal stress on avoiding dishonest means for material gains and usurpation of what does not lawfully belong to you. This scriptural sanction for the help (in cash by way of tithe and in kind through *langar*) rendered unto the poor and the needy is a very important philanthropic gesture. It attaches highest merit to moral and just action and to actions done in the service of mankind.

CONCLUSION

Guru Granth Sahib is obviously the 'body' of the Gurus who have manifested themselves, as spirit, in the Word. Thus, the ten Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib deserve our reverence, but the real object of our respect is the Word. This is unlike the Christian concept of Word : there the Word becomes incarnate in the person of Jesus, and thus Jesus becomes the centre of focus for the Christians. In Sikhism, we find the Gurus manifesting themselves as spirit in the Word, and Word becomes the centre of focus for the Sikhs. Thus, Word becomes an article of faith for the Sikhs and they revere it, and since Word is contained in the Granth (Guru Granth Sahib), the latter also becomes the object of a Sikh's deep reverence. Guru Granth Sahib can well be called a divinity but it cannot be called or considered a deity. The deep Sikh reverence for the Word must not be confused with the worship of a deity or an image at an altar.

The *bani* as we find included in the Sikh scripture is considered revelatory. It came to Gurus as God chose them as instruments to carry out His will. The Gurus uttered in mundane language the *bani* as it came to them, without any addition or alteration on their part. The work of preserving the *bani* in written form began with Guru Nanak, the founder of the faith, who put to pen his own verses as well as those of the holy men he collected from different places. The codex thus prepared he handed over to his successor as the time came who added to it his own hymns. Thus, additions continued to be made to this codex by successive Gurus until this treasure

reached Guru Arjan who compiled and canonized this *bani* into a single volume. Bhai Gurdas who acted as scribe with him completed the first recension in AD 1604 : the year 2004 saw the celebrations the world over of the 400th anniversary of its first compilation and installation. The work of writing the main text came to an end on Bhadon *vadi ekam* Bikrami 1661 and the installation was done on Bhadon *sudi ekam* the same year.

The scripture is now available in a 1430-page standard printed edition. The entire corpus is in verse and the major bulk of it has been assigned to different *ragas*, except a few compositions in the beginning (pp. 1-13) and at the end (1354-1430) which are not assigned to any *raga*. Those in the beginning are liturgical and form part of the Sikhs' daily regimen, and those at the end are all metrical compositions and have been titled after meters. The scripture begins with an invocatory *Mul Mantra* which stands repeated numerous times at the head of each section and sub-section in its full or abbreviated form. It concludes with an epilogue, titled *Mundavani* which literally means seal beyond which nothing can be added. The *Ragmala* at the end of the scripture has no thematic affinity with the remaining text and is of controversial origin : but the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* states that it must be a part of the printed text though one is free whether to read it or not along with the remaining scripture, depending on the local practice.

The Sikh scripture is an attempt to put into mundane language intelligible to people in a particular spatio-cultural context what has been revealed to the preceptors and what they uttered without any addition or alteration on their part. These utterances describe as well as prescribe the human ideal : Sikhism is a way of life lived according to the world-view enunciated by its spiritual preceptors in these utterances. The *bani* or Word as contained in the scripture is considered

revelatory in character and this enjoys the status of Guru or spiritual preceptor for the Sikhs. They are supposed to live their lives in accordance with the teachings enshrined in the *bani* and under the guidance of this Word-Guru.

It articulates the Sikh perception of God, man and the world as well as their relationship *inter se*. There is much emphasis on the unity of Reality : plurality of deities is straightaway rejected. The Sikh Gurus have perceived God as the one spiritual continuum solely responsible for the creation, preservation and possible re-absorption unto Himself of the entire manifest phenomena. Thus, they perceive Him as transcendent as well as immanent, stressing equally on both the aspects and declaring that neither aspect is more important than the other. This self-manifestation of God is under the self-regulative cosmic principle (*hukm*), and can be seen in the whole of the creation. All the creatures born of seed (*setaj*), egg (*andaj*), foetus (*jeraj*) and earth (*utbhuj*), all the four directions, the earth and the sky, day and night, and the sun and the moon all emanate from Him. The Lord is present (in spirit, though) on the earth and in the sea and everywhere else : the Creator-Lord can be perceived in the multiplicity of creation yet He retains His unity, says Guru Nanak – *jal thal mahial puria suami sirjanhar / anik bhanti hoe pasaria nanak ekankar*.

The immanence of God in all places and beings socializes the former and spiritualizes the latter. The place where resides the Lord is sacred : it cannot be *mithia* or *maya*. Such a place must not be renounced, rather one must live an active but righteous life in it so as to transform it into *sach khand* or the God's Kingdom on the earth. That is why the scripture condemns those who, though enlightened, renounce the world for self-emancipation : if the enlightened people like the *sidhas* renounce the worldly life in favour of asceticism, who will then take care of the welfare of the society, complains Bhai Gurdas

in one of his *vars*. Sikhism recommends householder's life and states that it is no hindrance in man's spiritual progression. Similarly, all humans are spiritually united with God, the latter being immanent, *qua* spirit, in each of them. This metaphysical doctrine becomes the *vis-a-tergo* of the Sikh social thought of ethnic equality, justice in human social affairs, mutual love and compassion, etc.

Although Sikhism originated in medieval Indian times, its message has modern outlook and is responsive to many modern-day challenges. The Sikh Gurus were able to foresee that the idea of religious exclusivism will not survive for long. They strongly advocated the theory that truth cannot be the monopoly of any specific tradition and that revelation cannot be the monopoly of any particular religion, caste or person. All religions are equally valid and all prophets and spiritual preceptors equally capable of leading man to his spiritual ideal. This kind of pluralist attitude is the need of the day when we live in a culturally and religiously plural society.

In today's world, different faith-communities are face to face with each other. People with different racial, cultural and religious backgrounds live as our next-door neighbours. To co-exist in peace and harmony with such neighbours, it is necessary that we know and appreciate the faith and practices of our neighbour. Dialogue at personal and community level is the only means to know and appreciate the otherness in the other. And this dialogue is possible only if we give up our exclusivistic attitude and instead adopt a pluralist one. The Sikh scripture is a concrete example of how religion can become a meeting-ground for different faith-communities.

Unfortunately, the Guru Granth Sahib has ever since its compilation remained confined within its sectarian limits. Its message has much relevance today, and it has the capacity to meet many challenges and resolve many problems of modern-

day life. The issues of human rights, pluralism, interfaith dialogue, environment, moral values in practical social life, etc. are some of the issues which major religions of the world are grappling with. It goes to the credit of the Sikh Gurus that they had the vision to foresee such problems and suggest remedial measures for them. The need of the day is to take this scriptural message out of the sectarian boundaries to mankind in general all over the world. That is perhaps what the Gurus wanted and doing so will be our greatest tribute to the great Gurus.